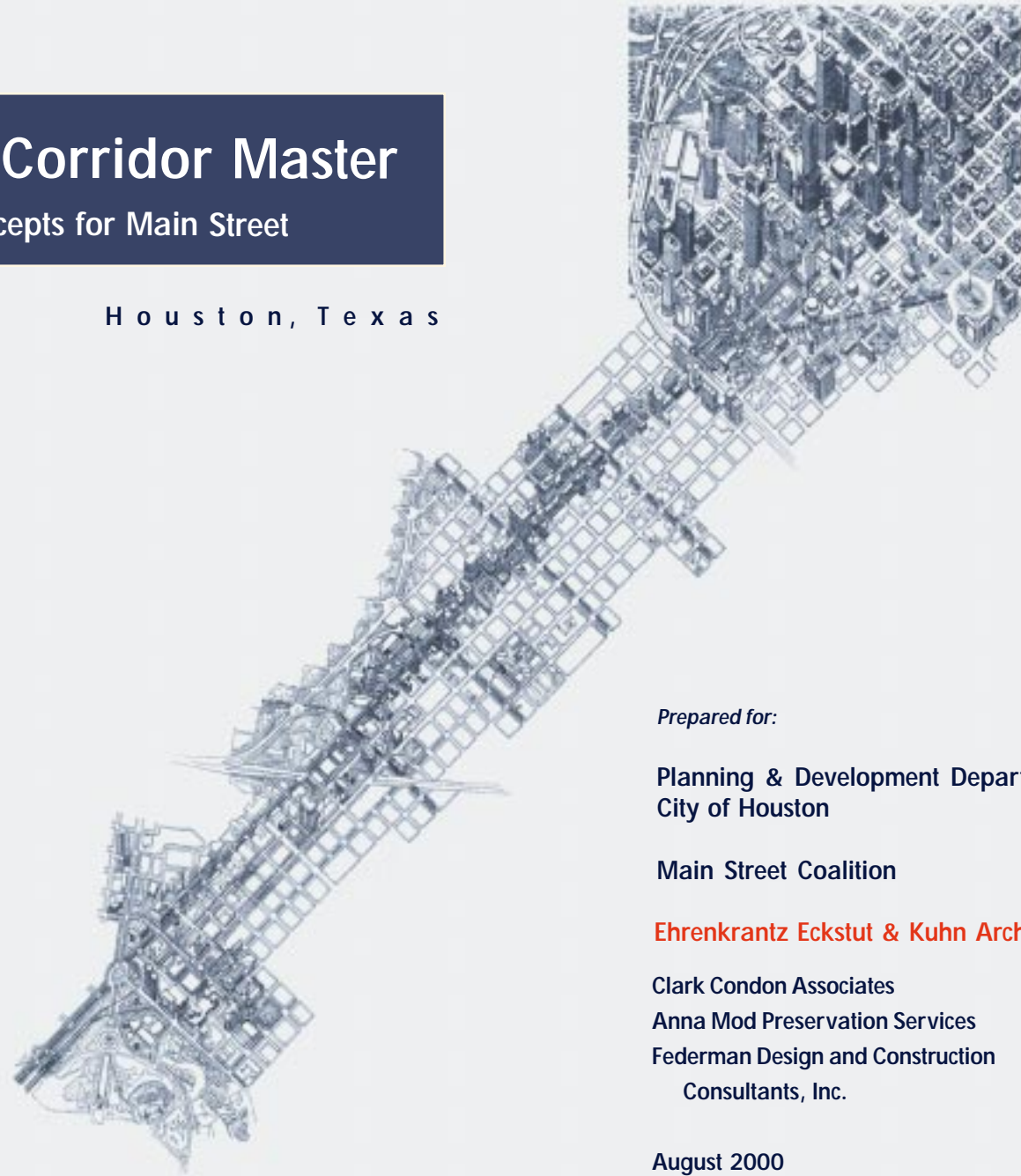




# Main Street Corridor Master Plan:

Design Concepts for Main Street

H o u s t o n , T e x a s



*Prepared for:*

Planning & Development Department  
City of Houston

Main Street Coalition

**Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects**

Clark Condon Associates  
Anna Mod Preservation Services  
Federman Design and Construction  
Consultants, Inc.

August 2000



Design concept model of the Main Street Corridor  
from Astrodome north to Downtown

Dear Mayor Brown and fellow Houstonians,

On behalf of the Main Street Coalition, it is my pleasure to present to you the **Main Street Corridor Master Plan: Design Concepts for Main Street**, an exciting vision of the future possibilities for Main Street. This Plan focuses on the opportunities for transforming Main Street into the City's "signature" boulevard, a magnificent tree-lined place with landscaped esplanades and gardens linking the many and varied urban venues and activity centers in the Corridor. It celebrates our diversity, demonstrates our "can-do" attitude, formulates our future and improves our quality of life.

For the past several years, Houston's Downtown, Midtown, Museum District, Texas Medical Center, Astrodome complex and their surrounding areas have experienced a vibrant resurgence of major public and private development activity and strong economic growth. The Main Street Coalition, with the support of the City of Houston, Harris County, Metro and over seventy-five stakeholders, institutions and organizations, developed this Plan to articulate a comprehensive new vision for Main Street. The Coalition will be the catalyst to help create an inviting, pedestrian-friendly, urban environment; and this Master Plan will point to a wide spectrum of exciting new focal points within the Corridor.

To mobilize and coordinate this massive revitalization effort, the Coalition will aggressively strive to implement "key" *District redevelopment actions* identified by the Master Plan and inspire innovative and bold steps to change the face of Main Street with an integrated light rail transit system seamlessly serving as the common thread that ties all the individual entities and uses together in a cohesive unit. Imagine for a moment, actually wanting to come and spend your day on Main Street. Picture an inviting, vibrant, colorful Main Street with an abundance of trees, median gardens and colorful banners. Envision a place where you can sip coffee at a sidewalk café, a place where a myriad of churches, museums, schools, parks, thriving shops, restaurants and other businesses exist along an alluring, shady, comfortable and attractive Main Street. Visualize living, working or visiting in the Corridor because your job, educational interests, recreational opportunities or needs for goods and services are all easily within your reach by walking or "riding the rail".

**This is a dream worth having and a vision worth pursuing. The Main Street Master Plan is a tool to help us make this dream a reality!**

Sincerely,

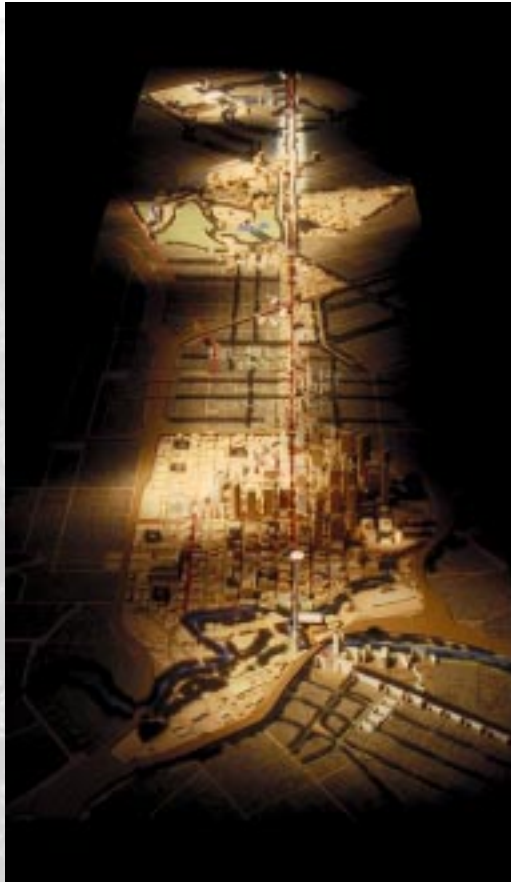
Ed Wulfe  
Chairman, Main Street Coalition



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## I. Executive Summary

No longer ambiguous or forgotten, Houston's Main Street is reconceived as part of a comprehensive vision — so bold and compelling that a public-private partnership has been mandated to provide a framework for making it a reality.

Conceived as a magnificent garden boulevard, the revitalized Corridor will build on Houston's heritage of great tree-lined streets and landscaped esplanades. This vision is to be a catalyst for promoting Houston as a "city of gardens" second to none, with Main Street as the city's signature boulevard for the new millennium.

Combining garden traditions found locally and internationally, Main Street will also meet the needs of the city's diverse urban family, leveraging public and private initiatives to improve the quality of life for all Houstonians.



By addressing the landscape in the right-of-way (street trees, trellises, esplanades, and public squares) — combined with the development of light rail transit (LRT) — the city's urban form can take shape prior to development, to define the public realm both pragmatically and poetically.

Main Street will once again become Houston's foremost gathering place — a first class address to live, work, and find recreation — and the center of everyday life.

Releasing the stranglehold of automobiles and interstates that have made Main Street obsolete, this plan will instill a new sense of civic pride in Houston. In the words of the ancient Athenian oath of citizenship, "in all these ways we will transmit this city not only not less, but greater, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."





Main Street is more than a right-of-way. It is a series of districts that vary extensively in their resources and history. Our goal is to maintain this diversity to promote the maximum number of choices within the corridor. The concepts for each district encourage greater density, active ground floors, and a mixture of uses in smaller “catchment areas” within walking distance of the LRT stations.

The concepts for each district are market-driven -- with uses and scale to be determined by market forces. The emphasis is on public spaces -- the streets and squares that will link various uses together. High-coverage buildings are encouraged to promote street-oriented architecture and active sidewalks. Although there is less open space, it will be of a much higher quality. By generating more pedestrian activity both day and night, the district plans serve to enhance ridership and security for the LRT system.



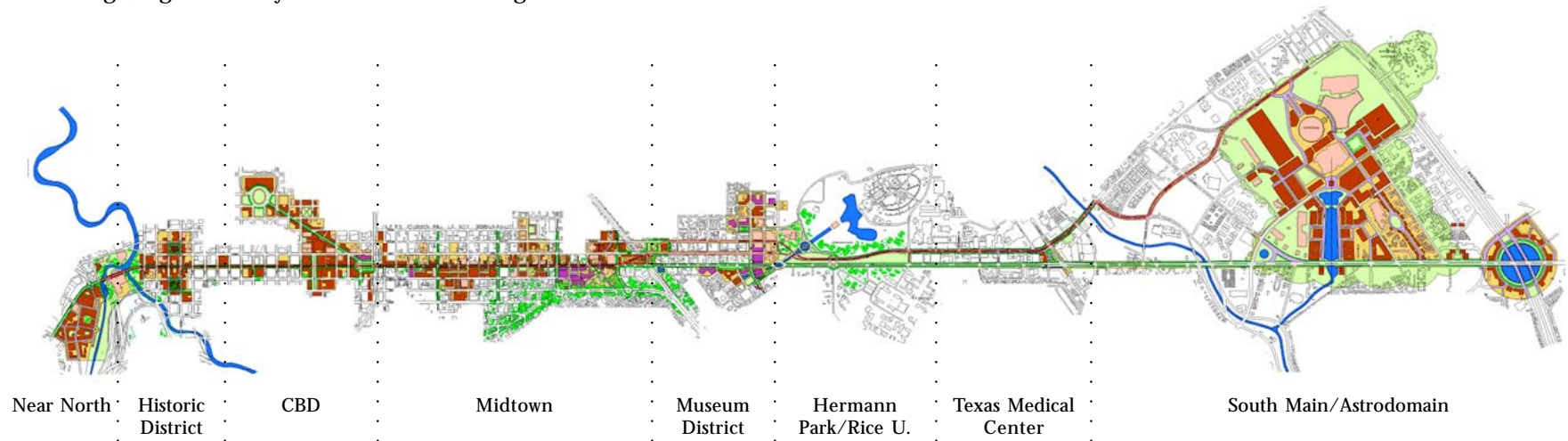
Main Street is a bigger idea, and everyone in the city will be on Main Street -- all uses, all interests, all cultures, and all institutions. Existing uses will be enhanced or expanded to be on Main Street. Ongoing projects and plans by others will be included and advanced. Many new uses will be added.

Main Street is to become a prestigious real estate address. Public investment in the LRT and street improvements will serve to attract significant private development to enhance the real estate value. Main Street's activity will serve to establish the corridor as the center of the region and a great symbol of Houston's stature. Its design and beauty will provide unusual amenities to welcome back residents and visitors alike.

## Principles

The over-arching principles of the Main Street Corridor Master Plan are as follows:

- **Everyone is on Main Street.** All existing uses and new development in the corridor will become a part of Main Street.
- **Anchors at both ends.** The Main Street Corridor will be anchored on the north by a major new Regional Transit Hub, and on the south by a great Exposition Park for the city.
- **Parking resources at major intersections.** Where the LRT intersects with major freeways, significant parking resources are planned to serve the districts and promote ridership -- without dominating the view.
- **Higher density development.** The development concepts promote higher coverage, higher density, and mixed uses throughout.
- **Enhanced public environment.** Development emphasis is on the public environment -- streets, squares, esplanades, and street trees.
- **A sequence of urban districts.** Anticipated LRT stations will become the focus of many sub districts within each district in the corridor.
- **A comprehensive corridor.** The development corridor is on both sides of Main Street, at least two blocks wide.
- **Landscape connections.** Throughout the corridor, landscaping will be used to humanize the urban environment, link places together, provide flood control, and reconnect Houston to its bayous.



## Main Street Corridor Master Plan





## Near North District

With its significant amount of underdeveloped land, the section of Main Street north of Buffalo and White Oak Bayous is seen as a unique opportunity for Downtown's expansion in the 21st century.

- Create a major regional transit hub that integrates LRT, Amtrak, buses, major freeways, and parking resources.
- Create a signature arrival element on Main Street from the freeways, perhaps in the form of the "world's tallest tower" that can establish a dramatic new identity for the district.
- Develop a new street-and-block plan to connect the vacant and underdeveloped parcels back to Main Street, emphasizing the signature boulevard as a focus of the new and existing neighborhoods.
- Develop a parking resource for the LRT (park-and-ride), University of Houston Downtown, and new development.
- Anticipate the potential for extension of LRT to the near-north neighborhoods.
- Enhance the edges of White Oak Bayou as part of a contiguous regional bayou park system.
- Provide a signature pedestrian access to the bayou park at the University of Houston's new LRT station, on the east side of the Main Street Bridge.
- Improve pedestrian access on the Main Street Bridge, including widened sidewalks. Develop a signature lighting plan for the bridge.
- Create a new pedestrian bridge for the district by utilizing the abandoned rail bridge across White Oak Bayou.

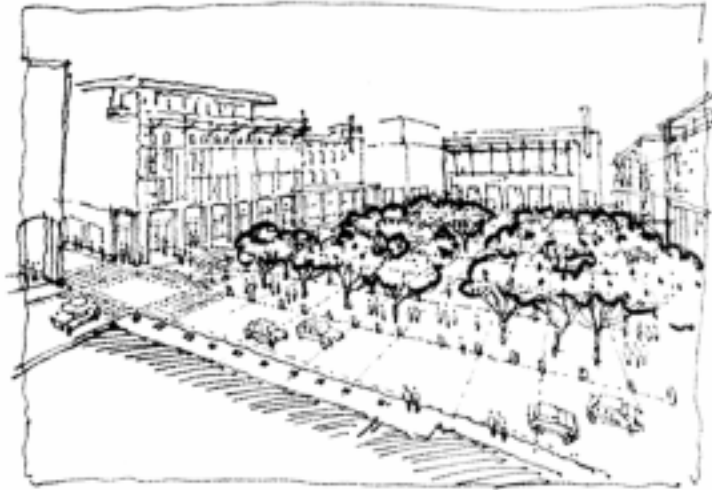




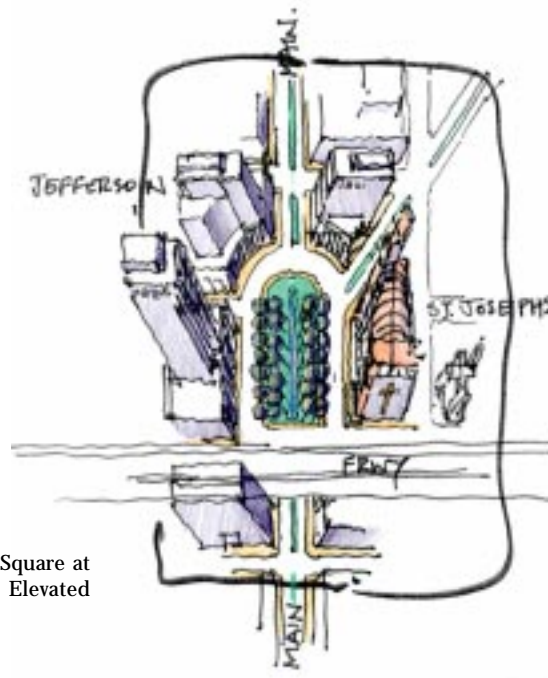
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<b>NORTH DISTRICT BAYOU PARK</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
		BLOCK, SIDEWALK, PLAZA	INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS	STATIONS	

**Main Street Corridor Master Plan**



Enhance Market Square as a public marketplace



A new Cathedral Square at the Pierce Elevated

## Downtown - Historic District

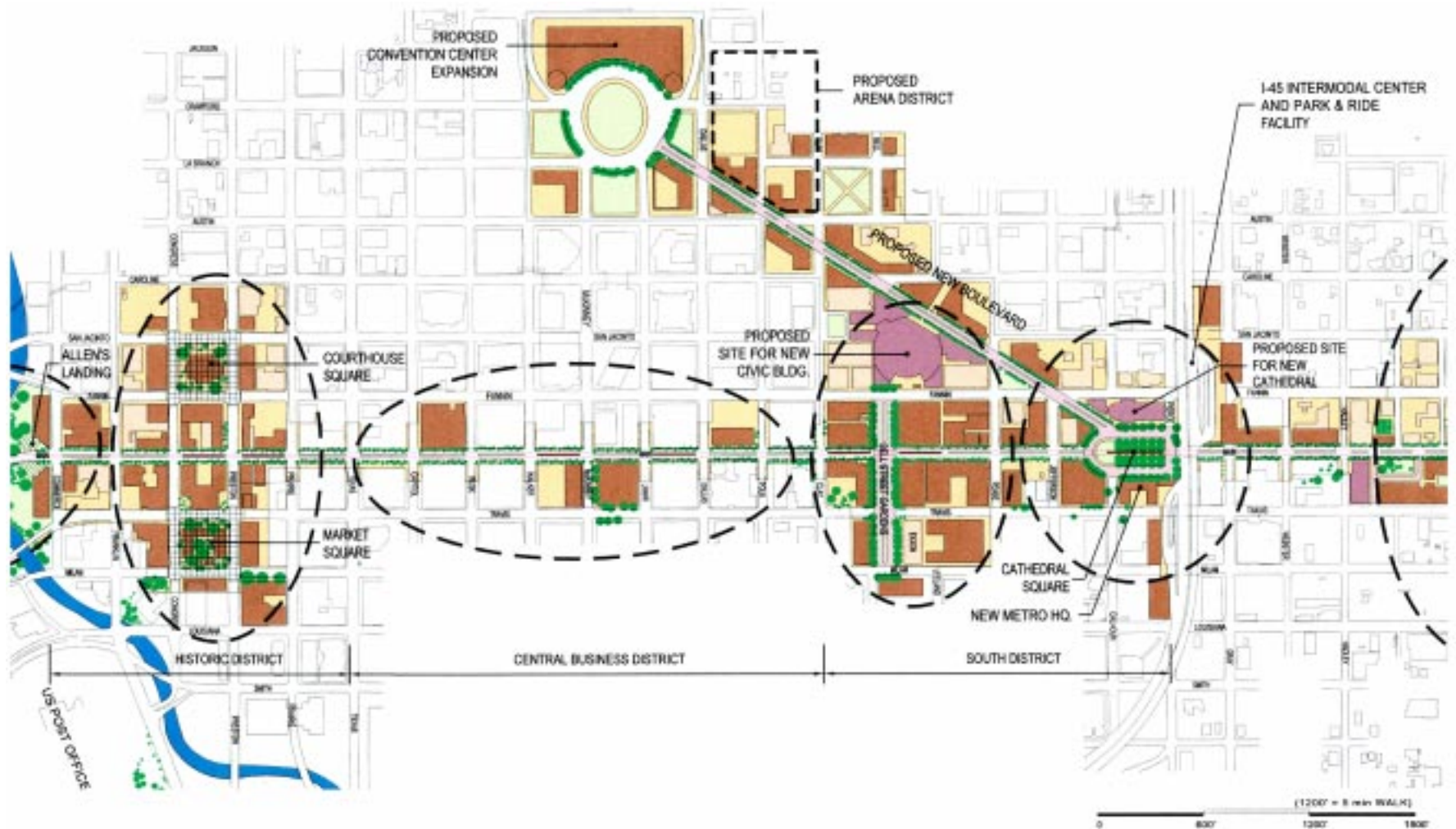
Texas Avenue is a natural transition between old and new, forming the southern boundary to the Historic District. The plan calls for a reinforcement of the east-west crossings at Congress & Preston (Cotswold Streets), defining a comprehensive district between Market Square and Courthouse Square.

- Enhance Market Square as a public market, perhaps with new pavilion-like structures.
- Integrate LRT stations with least amount of impact on the historic fabric.
- Reinforce Allen's Landing enhancements with complementary development along Commerce Street.
- In-fill all vacant parcels with smaller-scale development (3 to 5 stories), and encourage the use of porches and verandas to shade sidewalks.

## Downtown - Central Business District

- Create a major LRT station at McKinney & Lamar linked to the underground tunnel system.
- Develop a major new use with a "front door" on Main Street -- such as a new Arena or Cathedral.
- Create a significant diagonal boulevard that links the new Arena/Cathedral, Convention Center, and Enron Field beyond -- opening up new development opportunities.
- Develop a transit-oriented "Cathedral Square" at the Pierce Elevated on Main Street, integrating a new Cathedral, future METRO headquarters, a significant LRT station, park-and-ride, and related development.
















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## DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Houston, Texas

### LEGEND

	EXISTING STREETS		EXISTING BUILDINGS		PARKS		BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
	NEW STREETS		NEW BUILDINGS		TREES		STATION CATCHMENT AREA
	BLOCK, SIDEWALK, PLAZA		INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS		STATIONS		

## Main Street Corridor Master Plan

Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects

Clark Condon Associates

Anna Mod Preservation Services

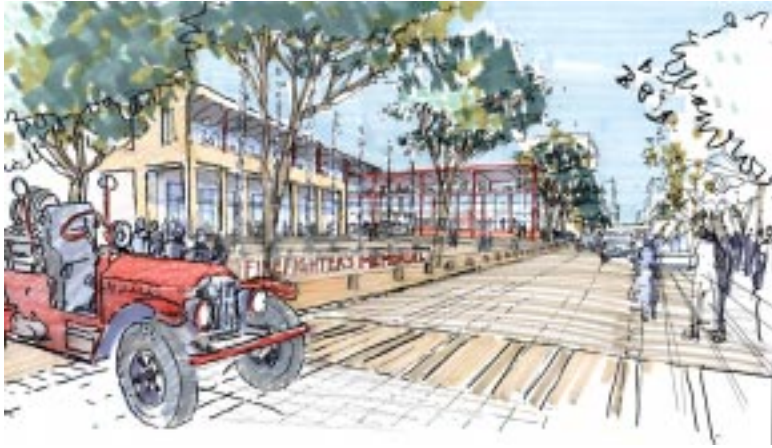
Federman Design and Construction Consultants, Inc.





Create a signature LRT station and streetscape at McKinney and Lamar





A new Firefighter's Memorial on Main Street



Intimate residential enclaves on the streets that terminate at Main Street

### Midtown - (North/Super Block District)

- Reinforce the corner of McGowen and Main Street at the LRT station with new development to the street edge -- as well as a Firefighter's Memorial at Main Street and Hadley.
- Develop new public open spaces between the LRT stations on Main Street at McIlhenny, between Dennis & Drew, and at Anita.
- Frame all open spaces with development.
- In-fill all vacant parcels with development to the street edge.
- Develop parking in smaller structures located off Main Street.
- Develop more intimate residential enclaves east of Main Street at McIlhenny, at Bremond, and between Dennis & Drew.
- Enhance connections to the Vietnamese commercial district west of Main Street, with a variety of blocks and open spaces.

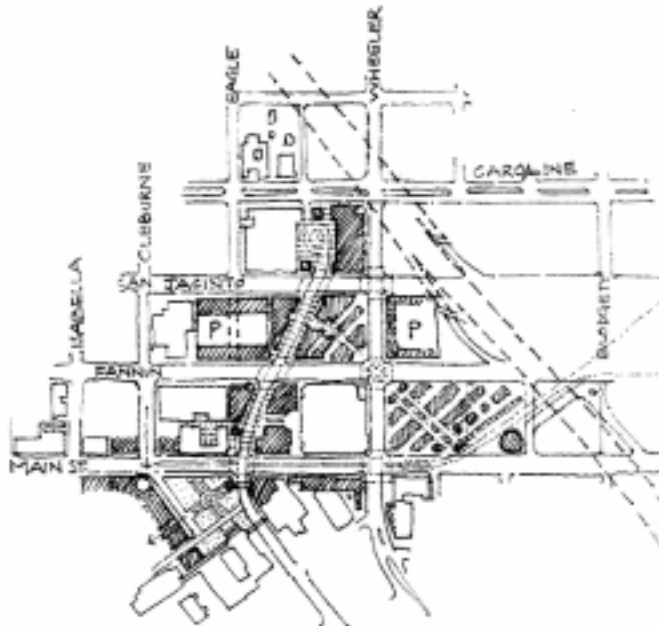
### Midtown - (Central/Houston Community College District)

- Develop a new public open space between Francis and Holman on the west side of Main Street at the LRT station.
- Frame all open spaces with new development.
- Reinforce east-west streets (Stuart, Francis, Holman, Berry) with in-fill development to the street edge.
- Encourage the use of secondary alleyways and courtyards as extensions of campus life.





Church Square -- the focus of a new mixed-use district



A comprehensive Flower Market district

## Midtown - (South/HSPVA)

- Create a joint development opportunity for the South Main Baptist Church and the future High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA).
- Develop “Church Square” as the focus of the district -- a significant open space framed by the Church, HSPVA, and new mixed-use development on the east side of Main.
- Consolidate existing surface parking into small, shared structures.
- Develop a campus-like environment for the HSPVA, with multiple buildings framing open spaces within a pedestrian-oriented environment.
- Modify the existing Spur 527 to create a parkway with new development frontage, encouraging some east-west crossings into Midtown.
- Develop a comprehensive Flower Market district at the LRT station between Wheeler & Blodgett, preserving the character of the existing Flower District with significant new formal and informal structures.
- Improve access to and from the 59 Freeway south of Wheeler to create a gateway to Midtown and the Museum District.
- Create new structured parking east of Fannin below the freeway for park-and-ride and local access.



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<b>MIDTOWN DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
		BLOCK, SIDEWALK, PLAZA	INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS	STATIONS	

## Main Street Corridor Master Plan





Midtown, Typical Streetscape





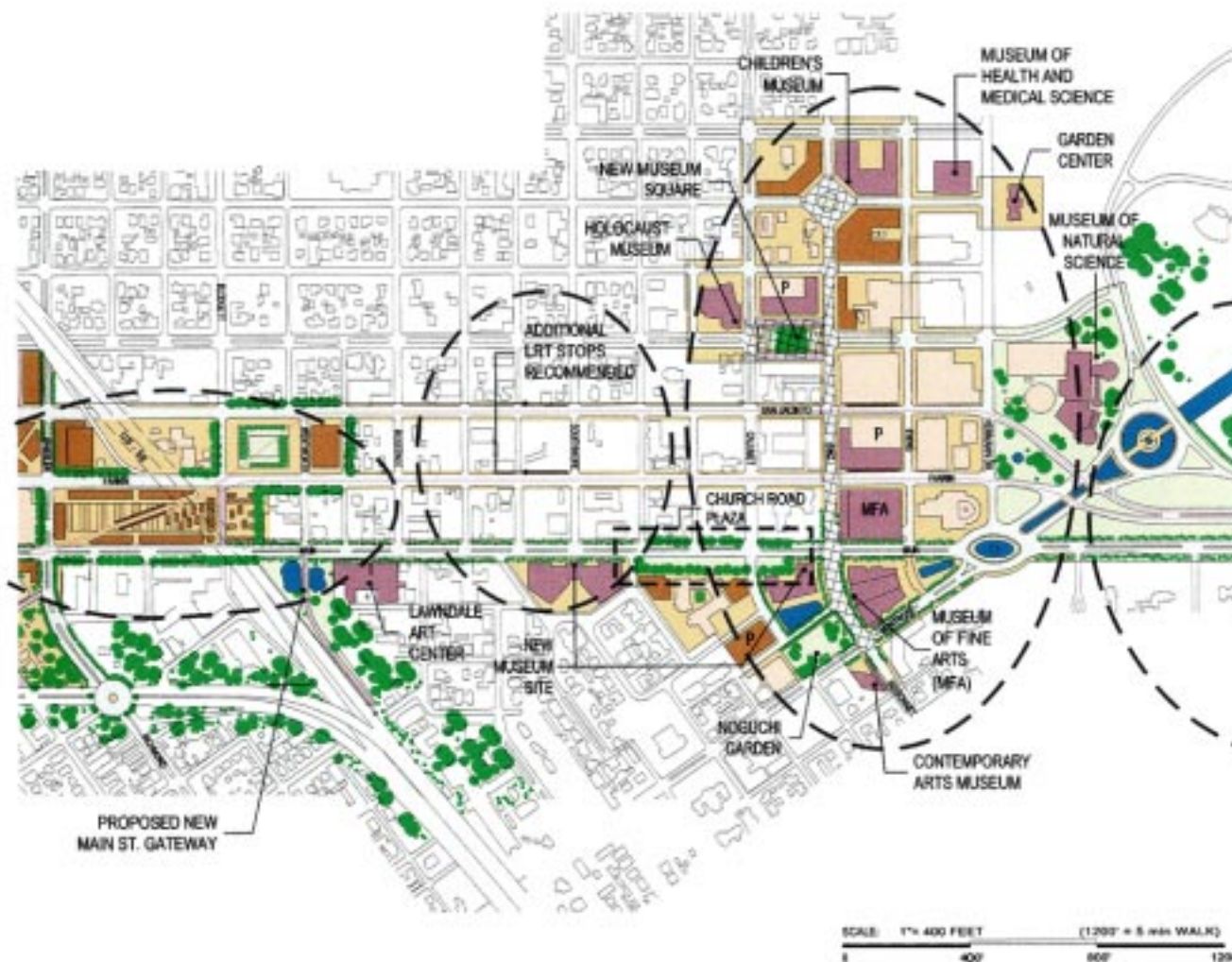
Integrate new LRT station with a pedestrian “Art Walk”



Expand the Holocaust Museum towards an enhanced Binz Street

## Museum District

- Create a new “front door” for the churches on Main Street -- removing curbs to create a European-style plaza framed by buildings and landscape.
- Consolidate existing surface parking at the First Presbyterian Church into a shared parking structure off of Main Street -- freeing up a new development parcel.
- Define a new museum site on the west side of Main Street at Southmore -- perhaps for an African-American or Hispanic Heritage Museum.
- Develop a fully-integrated sidewalk program for the entire district, including street furniture, lighting, events banners, and public art.
- Anticipate an additional LRT stop to increase ridership to the district, perhaps located at Southmore.
- Reinforce Bissonnet & Binz Streets as the “Museum Street” & “Art Walk” -the focus of the district, fully integrated with anticipated LRT station(s).
- Develop a new “Museum Square” between Binz and Calumet at Caroline, framed by commercial galleries, cafes, and a new “front door” for the expanded Holocaust Museum on Binz.
- Develop a new open space to anchor the Children’s Museum on Binz at LaBranch, framed by development.
- Integrate structured parking at each new open space, and throughout the district.
- Reinforce the Museum of Fine Art’s Noguchi Garden on Bissonnet with a complementary water-oriented open space. Create a more pedestrian-friendly entrance for the Museum of Fine Arts on Bissonnet, with the option of a pedestrian-only plaza for special events.



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<b>MUSEUM DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
		BLOCK, SIDEWALK, PLAZA	INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS	STATIONS	

## Main Street Corridor Master Plan





Create a more pedestrian-oriented entrance for the Museum of Fine Arts on Bissonnet, with the option of closing the street for special events





## Hermann Park/Rice University

- Create a continuous sequence of water elements from the Park's reflecting pond and lagoon to the Mecom Fountain on Main Street, incorporating the Sam Houston Memorial.
- Create an opportunity for temporary closure of Main Street at the Park during off-peak hours for outdoor art fairs or other public festivities.
- Develop the LRT station at Sunset in a park-like manner, framed by entry gates to Rice and Hermann Park.
- Emphasize entries to the Park and Zoo at the LRT station at MacGregor.
- Discourage new surface parking "lots" within Hermann Park. Explore opportunities to expand the Park's green space and utilize parking resources at the perimeter.



## Texas Medical Center

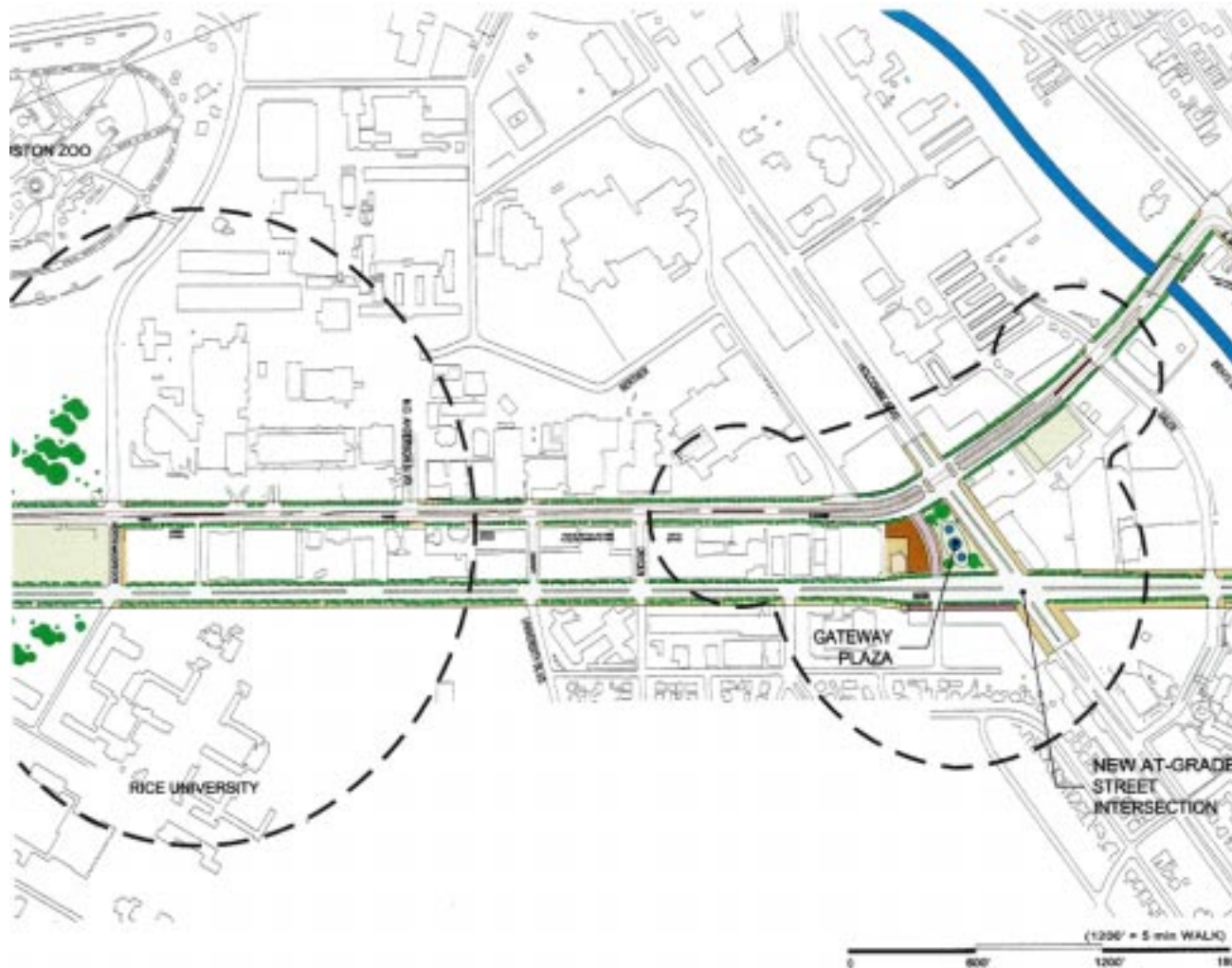
- Reinforce Fannin as the "Main Street" through the Medical Center.
- Encourage landscaped medians throughout, integrated with the LRT.
- Create a new "Gateway Plaza" at Holcombe by eliminating the grade-separated intersections at Fannin and Main Street, with new development opportunities for adjacent properties.



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<b>HERMANN PARK</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
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## Main Street Corridor Master Plan

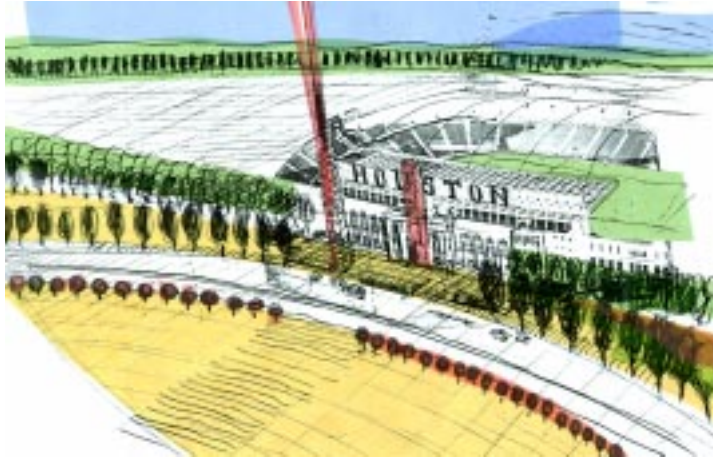


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<b>TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
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## Main Street Corridor Master Plan



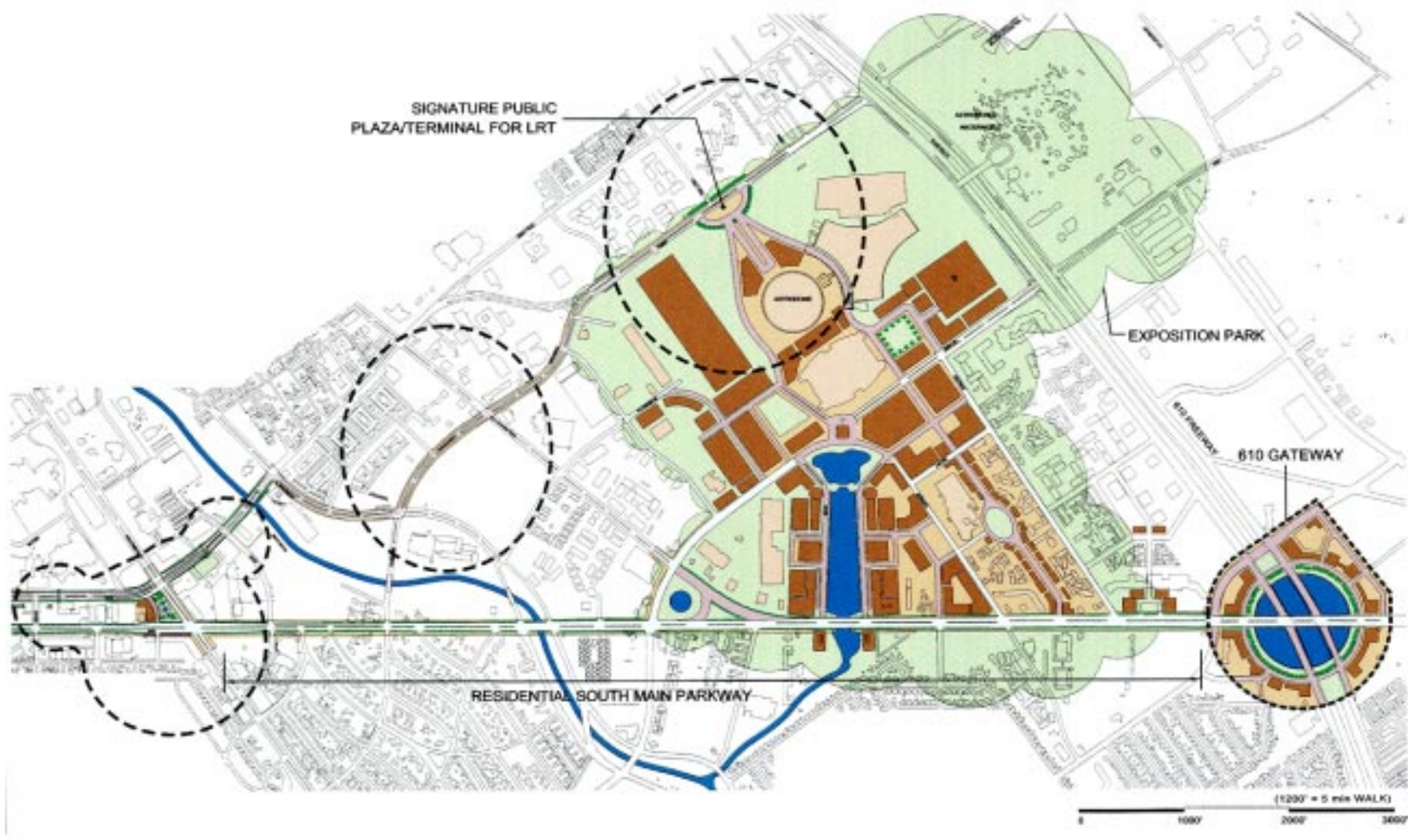


## Astrodomain/South Main

- Develop a great terminus for the LRT at the Astrodome and new Exposition Hall, with a significant new public open space and park-and-ride resource.
- Create a major landscaped Exposition Park -- a “new town in town” -- that links the Astrodome to Main Street and provides a new gathering place for Houston.
- Revitalize South Main as a parkway with landscaped medians, reinforcing its unique roadside tradition.
- Create a major gateway to Main Street at the 610 Loop, incorporating dramatic open spaces and water features for detention, framed with new development.



A new Gateway to Main Street at the 610 Loop

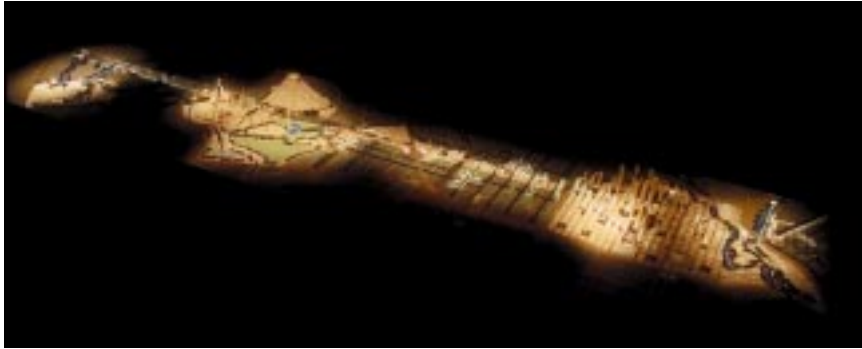


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<b>SOUTH MAIN DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
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## Main Street Corridor Master Plan



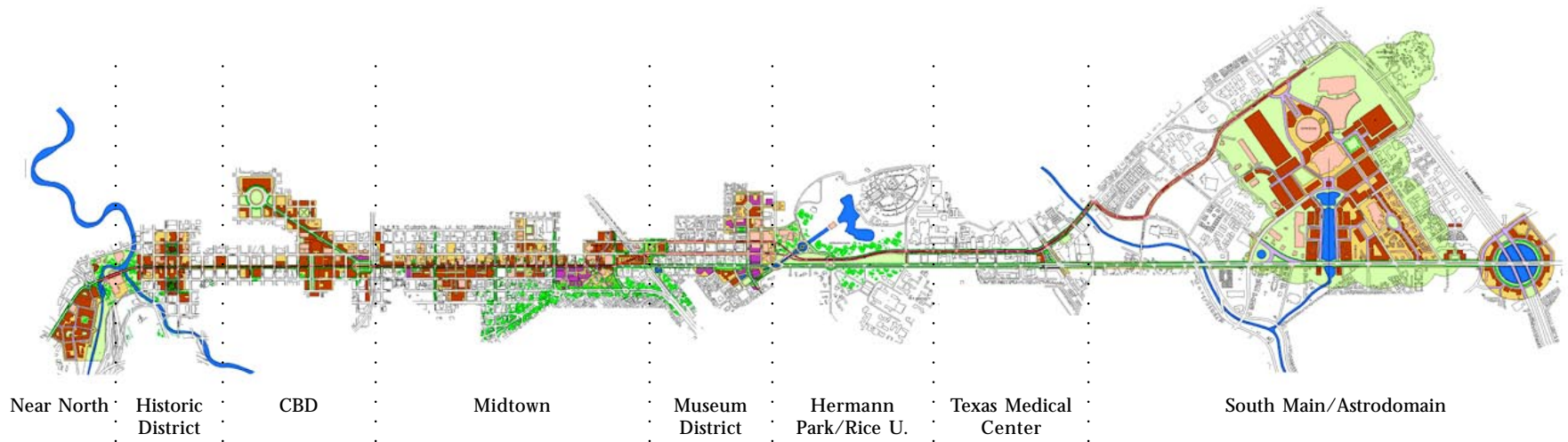


## Implementation

Implementation of this ambitious plan will be carried out through staged public infrastructure improvements, coordinated with the LRT construction and arranged to stimulate private development in the Main Street Corridor. In addition, three specific development districts have been identified for the implementation of more focused plans, including development guidelines and regulations:

- ***Downtown*** -- in the southern zone comprised of the new arena, new cathedral, future METRO headquarters, Pierce intermodal center, structured parking, and new development and open spaces.
- ***Midtown*** -- in the southern zone concentrated near the proposed Flower Market, HSPVA, Church Square, restored Sears Building, and new Latin Street.
- ***Museum District*** -- the zone centered along Main Street ("Church Row") and Binz Street ("Art Walk"), comprised of existing institutions, new museum development, and improved pedestrian linkages.

These three pilot districts have been identified based on their need for improvement; the concentration of diverse public, private, institutional, and community interests involved; and a level of manageability based on administrative structures already in place. Because of these resources already at work in the districts, their individual plans can be implemented more quickly to demonstrate a level of success that can then be duplicated throughout the entire Main Street Corridor.

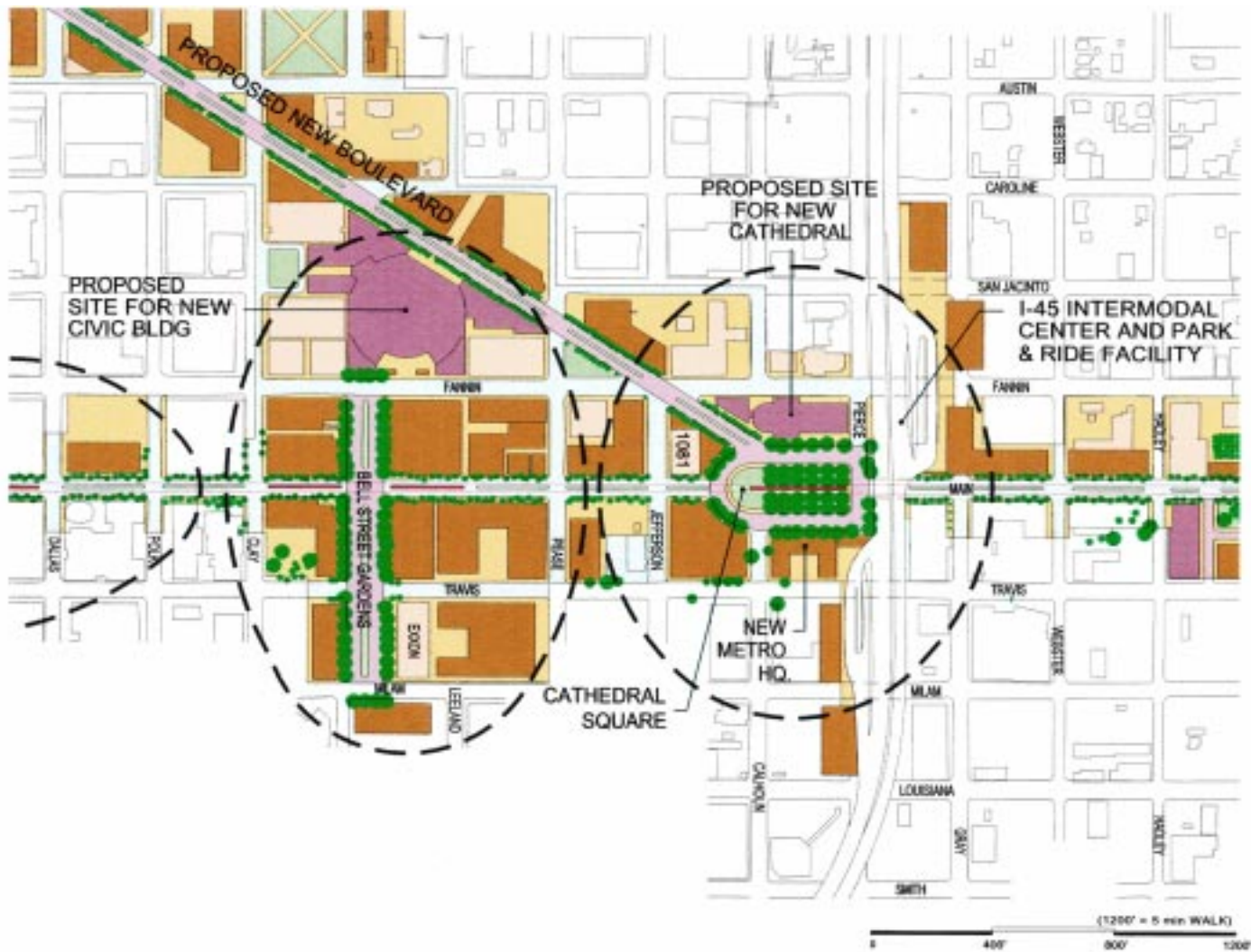


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<b>PLAN OVERVIEW</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
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## Main Street Corridor Master Plan

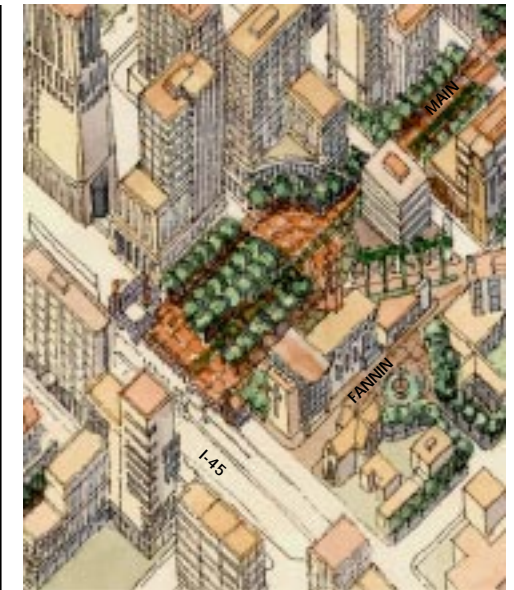




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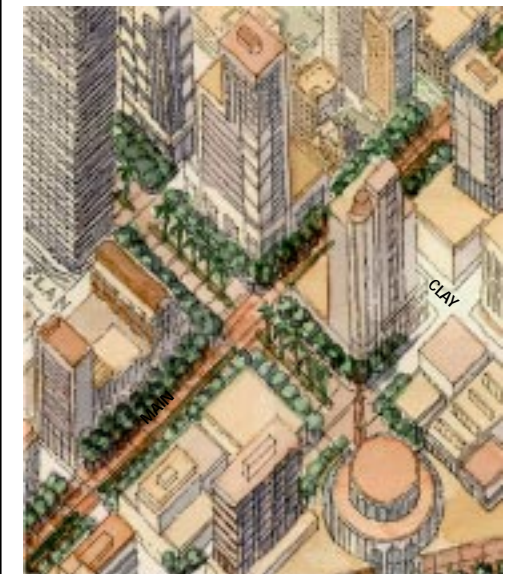
<b>DOWNTOWN IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	<div></div> EXISTING STREETS	<div></div> EXISTING BUILDINGS	<div></div> PARKS	<div></div> BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		<div></div> NEW STREETS	<div></div> NEW BUILDINGS	<div></div> TREES	<div></div> STATION CATCHMENT AREA
		<div></div> BLOCK, SIDEWALK, PLAZA	<div></div> INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS	<div></div> STATIONS	

## Main Street Corridor Master Plan

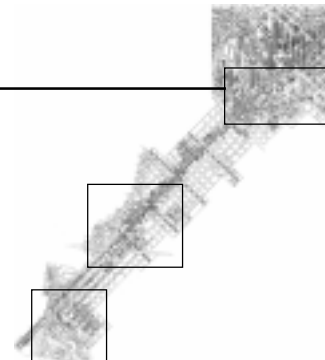


METRO SQUARE

BELL STREET



## DOWNTOWN IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT



## Main Street Corridor Master Plan

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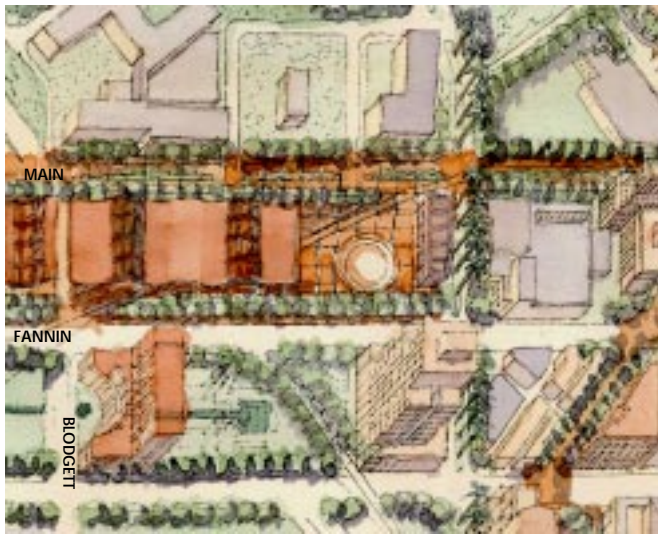


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<b>MIDTOWN IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	<b>LEGEND</b>	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
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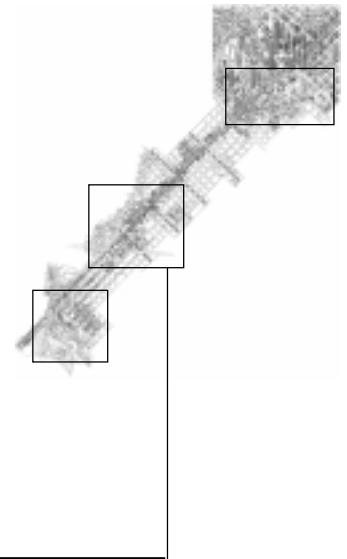




FLOWER MARKET AND LRT STATION



PROPOSED HSPVA AND CHURCH SQUARE



## MIDTOWN IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT



Main Street Corridor Master Plan





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<b>MUSEUM IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT</b> Houston, Texas	LEGEND	EXISTING STREETS	EXISTING BUILDINGS	PARKS	BAYOU/WATER ELEMENTS
		NEW STREETS	NEW BUILDINGS	TREES	STATION CATCHMENT AREA
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## Main Street Corridor Master Plan



MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

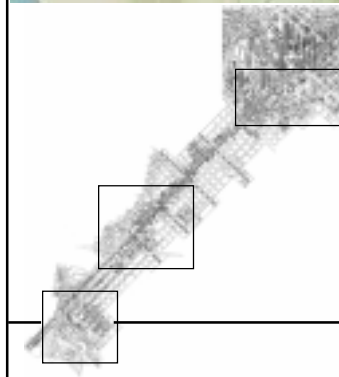


HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

CHILDREN'S MUSEUM



Main Street Corridor Master Plan



MUSEUM IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICT



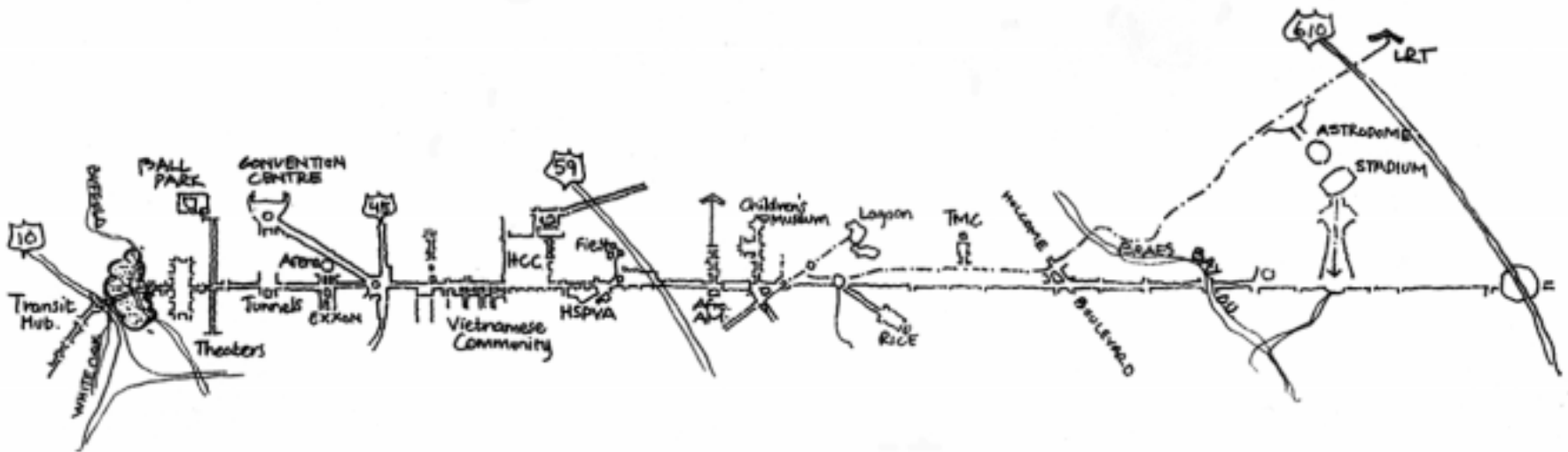
## II. Plan Overview



Main Street, ca. 1913

## Everyone Is On Main Street!

The overarching principle in the redevelopment of the Main Street Corridor is to bring everything and everyone to Main Street as Houston's central thoroughfare and gathering place. Existing uses that are already near the corridor -- such as the Convention Center, Vietnamese District, Museums, and Astrodome -- will be made to feel more a part of Main Street, emphasizing the city's vitality and diversity. Along with the anticipated LRT, new development will reinforce the street's special character, creating a vibrant urban environment that is second to none in the American landscape.



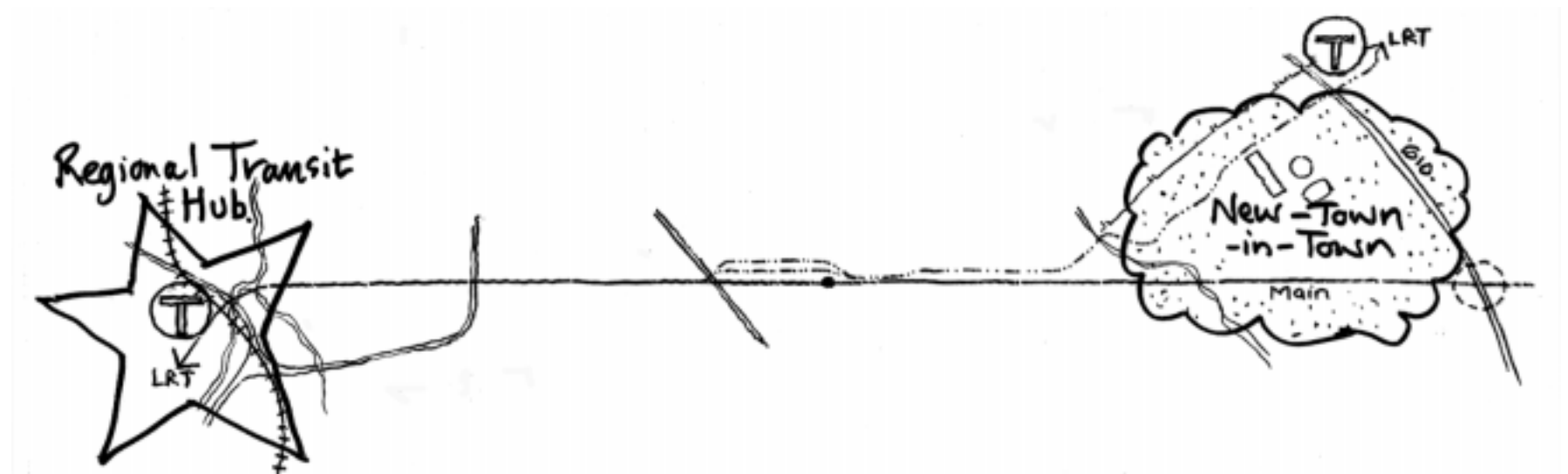


## Anchors at Both Ends

On a regional scale, an opportunity exists to create significant anchors at both ends of the Main Street study area, giving greater definition to the corridor's boundaries to establish a greater sense of place.

At the north end of Main Street, a major **Regional Transit Hub** will be situated at the confluence of freeways, bayous, future LRT, and Amtrak -- maximizing the value of the transportation resources. This hub will directly serve the parking and transit needs of the Near North neighborhoods and Central Business District, as well as encouraging ridership on the LRT by regional visitors throughout the entire corridor. The concentration of transit resources will also promote related development north of the bayous -- with a mixture of uses and a signature business address.

At the south end of Main Street, a "**New Town in Town**" will be developed on underutilized land near the Astrodome and Loop 610. This development will not only serve to link the Astrodome directly to Main Street, but will also create a new gathering place for Houston in the tradition of the great World's Fairs and Exposition Parks of the last century. Building on the sports and recreation theme of the Astrodome -- as well as the historic "roadside" character of South Main -- this new development will have its own special character and identity that sets it apart from other great districts in the Main Street Corridor.



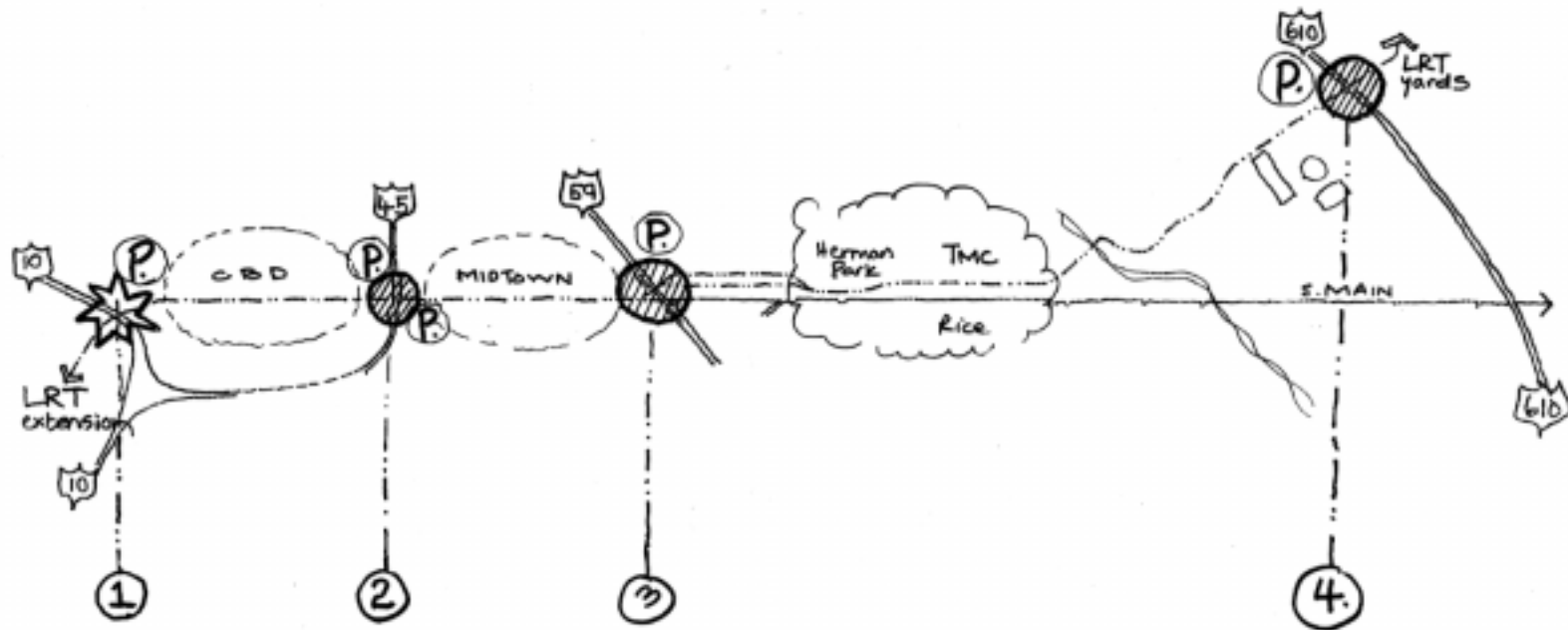
## Highway and LRT Intersections

Where the anticipated LRT intersects with major highways, opportunities exist for major auto-oriented destinations, with parking resources to serve the various districts within the Main Street Corridor.

1. **North End.** At the LRT and the I-10 Freeway, a major Regional Transit Hub will primarily serve the Near North and Downtown districts.
2. **Pierce Elevated.** At the LRT and the Pierce Elevated, a significant parking satellite will primarily serve Downtown and Midtown.

3. **59 Freeway.** At the LRT and the 59 Freeway, a major public parking resource will primarily serve the proposed Flower Market, Midtown, Museum District, and Hermann Park.
4. **Loop 610.** At the LRT terminus and the Loop 610, a significant park-and-ride facility will primarily serve the Astrodome and Texas Medical Center.

By linking the LRT directly to parking resources at every major freeway, every district in the Main Street Corridor can be served, alleviating parking problems and maximizing transit ridership.





## Vehicular Circulation

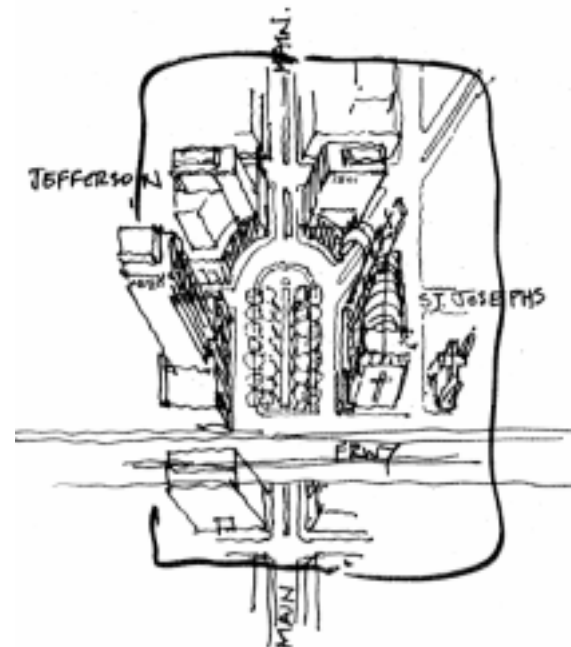
No immediate changes to the regional or local vehicular circulation patterns are anticipated to accomplish the major objectives of the Main Street Corridor development plan. However, a significant improvement in LRT ridership, clean air, and public consciousness can be accomplished by integrating various modes of transportation with related development. An example is the regional transit hub recommended for Main Street north of Buffalo and White Oak Bayous, which will link the LRT with the I-10 freeway, Amtrak, approximately 1,500 park-and-ride spaces, and future extensions to the Bush Intercontinental Airport and regional commuter lines.

In addition, a **comprehensive park-and-ride policy** is recommended for the Main Street Corridor to implement a goal of 10,000 spaces strategically located near freeway intersections and LRT stops. This strategy will encourage ridership by offering more direct transfers and accessibility to multiple destination visits on one single trip. Such a policy could perhaps be implemented through the creation of one or more "parking-transit" development authorities, which would be self-funded by parking revenues.

Minor local street changes are anticipated with the creation of significant new public open spaces on Main Street, including the new METRO/Cathedral Square in Downtown between Jefferson and Pierce; the "Church Square" in Midtown between Cleburne and Eagle streets; and the proposed transformation of the Spur 527 in Midtown into a parkway, which is intended to enhance the accessibility between adjacent neighborhoods and the LRT on Main Street. In addition, a new access ramp from the 59 Freeway to Main Street is anticipated at Wentworth.

Minor street changes are also proposed at the new Sunset Street LRT stop to provide improved access to Hermann Park and discourage through traffic west on Sunset at Rice. In addition, the new "Gateway Plaza" proposed between Main and Fannin Streets at Holcombe will require changes to existing vehicular patterns to normalize the intersections by bringing the underpasses to grade.

Other modifications on Main and Fannin Streets are anticipated as enhancements to the visual appearance, such as restoration of esplanades throughout. Convenience is enhanced by creating more intersections along South Main, thereby creating more choices to enter and exit. In addition, a policy of discouraging curb-cuts and parking structures on Main will significantly enhance the streetscape as a **first-class, pedestrian-oriented "front door" in Houston.**

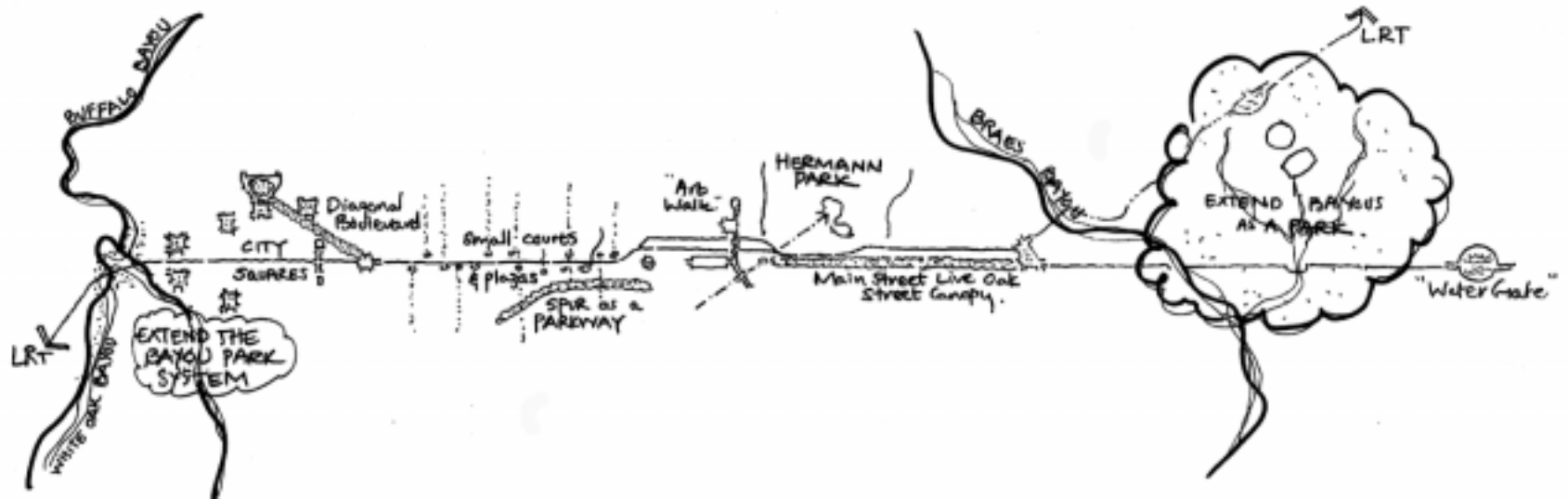


Where the LRT intersects with major freeways, major park-and-ride resources should be integrated with public space to encourage transit ridership.

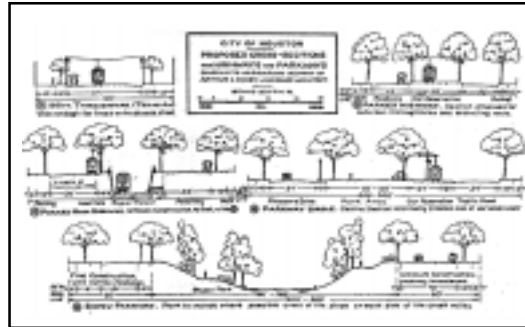
## Landscape Principles

Along Main Street and in each of its districts, landscape will be used as an important connection device -- forming linkages between various uses, reuniting the city with the natural beauty of its bayous, contributing to needed flood control, and creating a more pedestrian-friendly urban environment.

1. **Near North.** At the north end of Main Street, the bayou park system will be extended and enhanced.
2. **Downtown - Historic District.** Smaller town squares and pocket parks will be developed -- no larger than a city block.
3. **Downtown - South District.** A landscaped diagonal boulevard will link the Convention Center to Main Street, with public spaces at each end.
4. **Midtown.** A variety of smaller courtyards, patios, and plazas will form connections to east-west "greenways."
5. **Hermann Park.** Water elements will reinforce the visual axis from Mecom Fountain to the Lagoon.
6. **South Main.** Brays Bayou will be extended as a park system throughout the district, serving as flood control and creating a great exposition fair-ground that links the Astrodomain to Main Street.







## ***Landscape Principles - “A City of Gardens”***

Conceived as a magnificent garden boulevard, the revitalized Main Street Corridor will build on Houston’s heritage of great tree-lined streets and landscaped esplanades. This vision is to be a catalyst for promoting Houston as a “city of gardens” second to none, with Main Street as the city’s signature boulevard for the new millennium.

By addressing the landscape in the right-of-way (street trees, trellises, esplanades, and public squares) — combined with the development of LRT — the city’s urban form can take shape prior to development, to define the public realm both pragmatically and poetically.



One of the most beautiful urban environments in Houston, if not the country, is the stretch of Main Street along the Museum District, Hermann Park, Rice University and the Texas Medical Center. The most appealing and memorable aspect of the area is the presence of the formal rows of grand live oak trees arching over the roadways. This is a feature that Houstonians and visitors to the city can fully appreciate.



**Houston is a city of trees.** Trees provide comforting shade in what can be at times an unbearably humid climate. The need for shade cannot be overstated. Trees add greatly to the quality of life and character of the city.

There are extensive areas along Main Street that do not have street trees, and street tree plantings should be expanded to all parts of the corridor. The basis for this vision can be traced to Houston’s early roots. The proposed cross-sections developed by the Houston Park Commission in 1913 envisioned typical city streets lined with trees -- a proposal that was realized on Main Street in the vicinity of Hermann Park. Besides providing shade, these street trees reinforce the edges of the street and create linear continuity that buffers pedestrians and adjacent uses from automobile traffic.



Main Street crosses over three bayous between the Near Northside and the 610 Loop. Main Street also spans over Allen's Landing, where the city of Houston began at the confluence of Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou. The history of Houston is linked to the bayous.

**Houston is a city of water.** Approximately one third of Houston lies in a natural flood plain. When it rains in Houston, many parts of the city experience some flooding. But water also has a soothing and cooling effect with which Houstonians are familiar. It is common sight to see fountains in the city in many forms.



According to Barrie Scardino, "Houston developed a reputation as a place shaped by water. However, that water has shaped Houston in any profound way is far less intriguing than the way in which Houston has shaped its water."

Houston has for many years provided utilitarian solutions to flooding by creating drainage ditches and channelizing the bayous. Conventional practice dictates building detention basins to control runoff. Managing flooding requires more creative solutions, and some efforts are already being made. Sims Bayou is being redeveloped in a manner that would return the bayou to a naturalistic condition, control flooding in a more effective manner, and increase the city's usable open space.



Detention solutions should make water a usable amenity instead of a problem. The bayous can be developed as natural public open spaces for pedestrian and bike trails that provide access to a broader range of the city. Because of their size and openness, the bayous can provide welcoming extended views of the city.





Main Street's Esplanade Heritage



Esplanades on Caroline, Museum District

People need parks and open space as relief from the harsh urban condition. Houstonians enjoy the outdoors, but Houston is not a pedestrian-oriented city. The automobile has become the dominant force.

The vision for Main Street is to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment that offers an attractive, comfortable, safe, and convenient alternative to using the automobile. Street trees, plantings, esplanades, parks, open space, and other amenities within walking distance of the LRT will enhance the quality of life and make transit ridership more desirable. The first and last part of any transportation mode involves walking. Walking is cheap and is the key to an urban area's success.

**Landscape elements can establish connections to Main Street.** By expanding the park system or extending the bayous into the urban fabric, more usable open space can be created while linking one great place to another.

The physical requirements of the LRT system may affect decisions regarding landscape. Street trees will need to remain clear of catenary wires and the dynamic envelope of the rail cars. The variety, size, and spacing of trees will need to be carefully evaluated with regard to the transit system.



Aerial Rendering of Houston, 1891

## Historic Preservation

The spirit of progress and development that characterizes Houston is not without cost—it often occurs at the expense of historic buildings, sacrifices the city’s sense of place, and prohibits a long-term sense of community identity for Houstonians and visitors. Sadly, in the area of historic preservation Houston is known, not by the historic buildings that have been saved, but by those that have been lost. Perhaps in the future it will be the layers of Houston’s urban fabric that show the aggressive development that defines Houston’s inner-city character.

America’s fourth largest city is also the country’s largest city without zoning. Local protection through preservation ordinances and historic district designations is effectively used across the country to safeguard historic resources and provide incentives for sensitive rehabilitation. Typically, preservation ordinances “hang” on the structure of zoning laws. Without this, Houston was late to develop a preservation ordinance and did so in March of 1995.

Since that time, five historic districts and over one hundred individual buildings have been locally designated as City of Houston Landmarks. Prior to Houston’s Historic Preservation Ordinance, historic buildings and districts were routinely listed on the National Register of Historic Places or designated as Registered Texas Historic Landmarks. Contrary to popular belief, listing on the National Register of Historic Places or state marker programs afford no protection for historic buildings owned by private citizens, municipalities, or state or county agencies. The most effective preservation occurs at the local level through preservation ordinances.





300 Block of Main Street

Houston is a city of odd juxtapositions and layered development patterns that are very evident in the built environment. The 300 block of Main Street is a visual delight and displays popular architectural styles from the 1870s through the mid 1900s. As we have now entered the 21st century, buildings constructed in the 1950s have approached and passed the fifty-year mark in age and are eligible to be designated historic by local, state, and national programs.

Alterations of buildings such as The HUB (312 Main Street), built in 1934 and refaced in the 1940s or 1950s, have reached an age at which the “slipcover” -- once considered an unfavorable alteration -- can be considered part of the historic changes the building underwent over time. Thus, these changes are an important part of the building’s history and the history of this block of Main Street. The preservation of the slipcover is now as valid as removing it and restoring the building to its original 1934 appearance. It is exciting to see that the owners of the slipcovered buildings in this block have chosen to respect, maintain and preserve the architectural styles of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This approach to preservation is not new. Preservationists fight hard to save historic buildings of previous eras from demolition. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the excitement of modernism swept the country, and the architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was considered by many to be passe, old fashioned, and without aesthetic value -- and thus ideal land for redevelopment, minus the building. In this climate, the architecture of the Victorian era was most at risk of demolition. The same is true today, only it is the architecture of the early to middle 20th century that is most threatened, because it is not valued as being historic.



Postcard Collection, Anna Mod

Foley's Department Store

Preserving buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier has become accepted and institutionalized across the country with the success of local preservation efforts and Main Street Programs. Now the rush is on to demolish the passe and old-fashioned modernist architecture of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Ironically, many early modern buildings are demolished to construct new, “fake” historic buildings or build progressive parking lots with ground floor retail. In downtown Houston, Foley's Department Store, built in 1947 and designed by Kenneth Franzheim, is considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places due to the quality of Franzheim's design and its significance as a prototype of the postwar downtown department store.



Photo: Maria Perez

Main & Elgin Building - recently demolished

This is not to say that the restoration of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings has run its course and is no longer valid. It is important to continue to save and restore 19<sup>th</sup> century structures. In the process, it is imperative to be mindful of the architectural validity of later styles and the statement that buildings make about the time and culture in which they were built.

**Houston is losing its architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.** In December of 1999, Main Street lost the Main & Elgin Building, built in 1949 and designed by Kenneth Franzheim. Stone banding enhanced the horizontal lines of the brick retail building, a modernist interpretation of the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright. The 1965 Southwestern Bell Building, on the northwest corner of Main Street and Elgin, is a good example of a 1960s interpretation of the International Style. Southwestern Bell was the first company in Houston to relocate their corporate headquarters outside of downtown. The building is not yet old enough to be considered for historic listing, but it has caught the eye of preservation professionals. The building was recently purchased by the Houston Community College system and is undergoing alterations.



Photo: Maria Perez

Southwestern Bell Building

## Methods

For the historic preservation component of the conceptual plan for Houston's Main Street Corridor, existing historic resource surveys and databases were used, as well as field work and archival research. Resources included:

- Downtown to Astrodome Corridor, Historical Properties Identification for State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) Review, June 16, 1999, Prepared by Myra L. Frank & Associates, Inc. and METRO.
- City of Houston Landmarks Listing, Courtesy of G. Randal Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Houston.
- Database of Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHL), Courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission
- Texas Historical Commission's Atlas Database, which is accessible online at <http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/>

The outcome was a merger of all of these information sources into a single database called The Historic Resources of the Main Street Corridor: National Register of Historic Places, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and City of Houston Landmark designations.

## Marker Programs

The National Register of Historic Places is a program administered by the National Park Service under the Secretary of the Interior. The Register, also called the "NR," is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register has the following results which assist in preserving historic properties:

- Recognition that a property is of significance to the nation, state or local community.
- Consideration in the planning for federal or federally assisted projects.
- Eligibility for federal tax benefits, or federal assistance for historic preservation, when funds are available.

The National Register affords no protection for historic properties. The only exception is that federal projects (such as interstate highways) and federally funded projects (such as the METRO light rail proposed in Houston) must consider the impact that their undertaking will have on National Register listed or National Register eligible properties.

**Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL)** is a marker program administered by the Texas Historical Commission, the state's agency for historic preservation. RTHL designation is the highest honor the state bestows on historic properties for architectural and historical significance.

**City of Houston Landmark/District.** Adopted by City Council in March 1995, Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance is designed to recognize and protect the city's historic properties and sites, many of which are within a five-mile radius of downtown. Once a building is designated, the ordinance regulates exterior alterations, new construction, relocation, or demolition of any historic structure, object, or site -- as well as the excavation of any archeological site. The ordinance does not regulate land use or interior alterations or remodeling and does not override deed restrictions.





The Rice Hotel

### ***Existing Tax Incentives for Historic Properties***

- **Federal tax credits** - Income producing (commercial) properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for a 20% tax credit for a certified rehabilitation of historic structure.
- **County tax abatement** – A tax abatement offered to commercial properties for seven years' abatement of county taxes. Property must be a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.
- **City of Houston Landmark** – tax abatement of property taxes is available for five years. The property must be a City Landmark and have a Certificate of Appropriateness issued from the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission. If Harris County grants a property owner tax abatement, the city abatement is extended an additional two years (seven years total). If the county and the school district grant abatement, the city abatement is granted for a total of ten years.

## Public Art



Public art is not just about art in public places; it's the art of making places public. There are many opportunities for art to enhance the Main Street Corridor and to contribute to the creation of unique civic spaces, as well as “wayfinding” and cultural identity.

The best way to pursue these enhancements is to integrate artists into the design phase of each project so that public art can be incorporated directly into the construction phase with little or no additional cost. Artists should be considered part of the design team. Art is not simply an object, but quite often an innovative solution to a design problem.



1. **Plazas and squares.** Working with architects and landscape designers, artists can integrate art as fountains, shading devices, and other features that encourage people to gather and linger.
2. **Street furniture.** Street lighting, benches, paving, and banners can be designed by artists to enhance the pedestrian experience. Artists can also mitigate the negative impact of tunnels and skywalks on streetlife, by designing and integrating such elements at the street level.
3. **Bayou crossings.** Building on the recommendations of the Houston Framework, art can be an important tool for reconnecting Houston to its bayous. Vertical elements can be designed to denote a bayou crossing for automobiles and pedestrians, and can be given a night-time character through special lighting.
4. **Gateways.** Gateways can be developed as one-of-a-kind art elements or artist/architect collaborations -- perhaps in partnership with active community groups, special districts, and other organizations.



METRO prototype shelter

5. **Interchanges and overhead freeways.** Collaborative design by artists and architects can enhance the green space at interchanges through earthworks, water features, and sculptural elements. Interchanges also offer an opportunity to showcase large-scale artworks on a temporary basis.
6. **LRT.** The stops on the light rail system present an opportunity for artists to be involved in the development of signature elements.
7. **Temporary projects.** Medians and esplanades throughout the corridor provide opportunities to showcase temporary works of art.

One of the key overall recommendations is partnerships. The scale of the Conceptual Design Plan and budgetary constraints preclude any single organization from being the sole initiator of enhancements. In terms of public art, key prospective partners include local governments, cultural institutions, community organizations, and special districts. For example, if a new civic space is developed adjacent to the HSPVA, students could play a key role in conceptualizing and designing the artistic components of the space. In all cases, every effort should be made by the City and the Main Street Coalition to solicit the active involvement of key partners as early as possible in the planning stages of any new project.

In order for art to serve as a versatile and valuable tool in the revitalization of the corridor, public art design enhancements should be one of the elements discussed with groups at all planning meetings. The Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County (CACHH) can serve as a resource for the City, the Main Street Coalition, and others by reviewing projects in the early stages of development and identifying key opportunities for artist involvement. Both CACHH and the other cultural organizations in the corridor can help provide access to the artistic resources necessary for the integration of art throughout the corridor.



### III. District Plans



Main Street, ca. 1922



Model View, Looking West



Main Street - Existing Conditions

## Near North District

Houston's Near North is one of the most underdeveloped resources of the central city. Benefiting from its proximity to major freeways, Downtown, and Buffalo and White Oak Bayous, the area is ripe for dramatic change with the anticipated arrival of LRT. Large tracts of vacant property in the Near North -- including abandoned railyards -- create opportunities for significant mixed-use development that can become an important new resource for neighborhoods to the north and south -- and a regional destination for Houston.

### *A Major Transit Hub*

As the northern anchor of the LRT corridor, the Near North district should be developed as a major regional transit hub that integrates LRT, buses, the major freeways, and a significant park-and-ride resource. This transit hub would create immense value for the district, promoting a mixture of development that can take advantage of its unique accessibility. Concentrating transit resources in a central location -- and anticipating the LRT's future extension northward -- can also better serve the parking and transit needs of Downtown, the University of Houston-Downtown, the neighborhoods to the north, and the entire Main Street Corridor.

### *A Great Urban District*

As a gateway to Downtown and the north neighborhoods, Main Street north of the bayous creates a negative "first impression" for many visitors. A more dramatic arrival element should be created on Main Street from the freeways, perhaps incorporating a traffic circle, water feature, or tower -- to welcome visitors and to help define the Near North as its own unique district in Houston. A street-and-block plan should also be developed for vacant parcels, to encourage growth that is more urban in character. The new streets will be linked to Main Street and other major thoroughfares in a manner that best serves the traffic, circulation, and parking needs of the district.



### *The Bayou Park System*

The edges of White Oak Bayou should be developed in a manner that links together and extends Houston's growing system of waterfront parks. Access to the water's edge should be facilitated wherever possible, with related development that offers a variety of experiences. For example, the University of Houston's anticipated LRT station on the Main Street Bridge should facilitate public access to bayou parks to the east. The existing abandoned rail bridge across White Oak Bayou should be retained and utilized for pedestrian access, offering a new way to view and experience Houston's bayou heritage.

### *A Revitalized Main Street Bridge*

As a significant historic structure, the Main Street Bridge over Buffalo Bayou should be given new prominence as a major gateway. Pedestrian access on the bridge should be greatly improved, including widened sidewalks. Restoration of the original lighting should also be developed for the Main Street Bridge, dramatizing views of the structure from the east and west.





## Downtown



Houston's Downtown is experiencing a remarkable renaissance. The Main Street Corridor Master Plan Conceptual Design Plan must reinforce and build upon the recent growth and improvements, such as the Cotswold Streets program. As a principal downtown bus corridor, Main Street has been neglected in many respects, and a major effort must be made to re-establish Main Street as a great urban street and Houston's primary thoroughfare -- not only for light rail, but also for automobiles and pedestrians.

Many major landmarks in Downtown -- including the Theater District, Convention Center, and new Enron Field -- are located away from Main Street. New development and improvements should be implemented in a manner that makes all Downtown uses feel more connected to a revitalized Main Street.



Historic District - Cotswold Street



South District - Existing Conditions

### *Downtown: Historic District - (Buffalo Bayou to Texas Avenue)*

The Historic District between Buffalo Bayou and Texas Avenue is Downtown's most actively regenerating sector. This urban revitalization should be supported and enhanced, with special attention given to Main Street.

The new light rail infrastructure on Main Street must be integrated with the least amount of impact to the historic fabric of the District. The LRT stations here should become a seamless part of the street environment, such that transit does not dominate the view. Overhead catenary wires should be suspended from existing buildings, rather than from free-standing poles.

The east-west crossings at Congress & Preston -- part of the Cotswold Streets Project -- should be reinforced with development to create a more comprehensive district between Courthouse Square and Market Square. Opportunities should be explored to revitalize Market Square as a public market, perhaps with new pavilion-like structures that recall the square's early roots as a thriving marketplace.

To the north, the on-going restoration and enhancement of Allen's Landing should be reinforced, with integrated development along the south side of Commerce. Opportunities for temporary or water-resistant structures should be considered for the north side of Commerce along the Bayou, to bring commercial activity back to the water's edge, as in the early days of Allen's Landing.

Throughout the Historic District, all vacant parcels should be filled in with smaller-scale new development (3 to 5 stories), to maintain the more intimate character of the streetscapes. Small pocket parks and cloistered courtyards should also be considered for vacant parcels, to create valuable green space and to add to the area's variety and discovery.



Original Town Hall and Public Market, ca. 1891

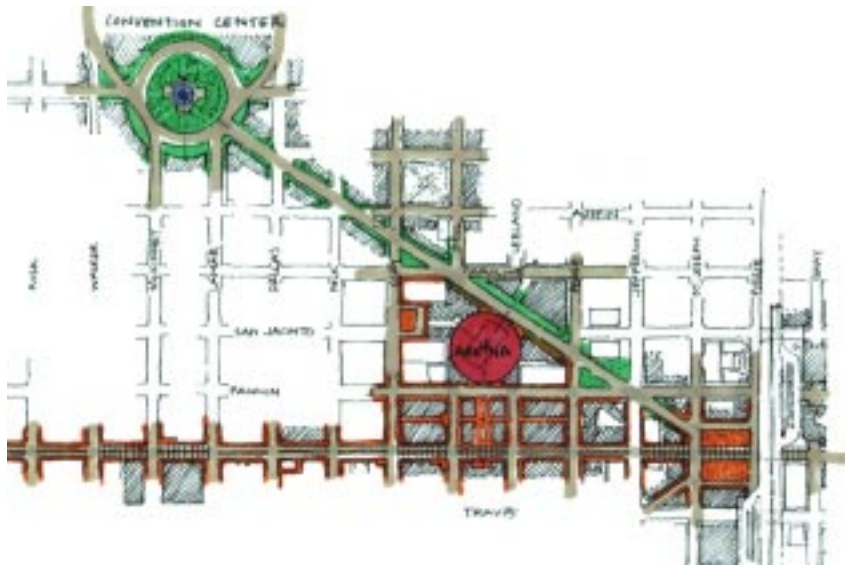


### ***Downtown: Central District - (Texas Avenue to Polk Street)***

The central portion of Main Street is primarily a daytime district, dominated by office uses and structured parking. Foley's department store is one of the enduring landmarks here, and its streamlined character is in keeping with the area's more contemporary and corporate atmosphere. The streetwall on this portion of Main Street is largely complete -- or under construction -- with very few setbacks.

A major LRT station should be created at McKinney and Lamar -- the heart of Main Street downtown. Linked to the underground tunnel system and integrated with the urban streetscape, this station will have its own special character as a "front door" for doing business in Houston.





### ***Downtown: South District - (Polk Street to Pierce Elevated)***

The southeast quadrant of Downtown is the least developed, offering the greatest opportunity to be defined by significant new development. A major new institution is proposed for this quadrant -- such as a new Arena or Cathedral -- with a "front door" on Main Street to attract related development, to activate the sidewalks and streetscapes, and to promote transit ridership.

To maximize the benefit of such a development, the institution itself should be viewed not as a free-standing "object" building, but rather as the centerpiece of a vibrant daytime/nighttime district. By locating the new institution one block from Main Street, a dramatic forecourt can be created in between, similar to the Channel Gardens of Rockefeller Center in New York City. This forecourt will become a great new public space in Downtown, framed by a mixture of development uses -- such as boutique stores, bars, restaurants, and cafes.



A New Arena and Retail Promenade

The relatively vacant landscape of the southeast quadrant of Downtown creates a unique opportunity for a complete transformation. A dramatic diagonal boulevard is proposed, extending from the Pierce Elevated to the Convention Center, and anchored by significant public spaces at both ends. Such a boulevard would accomplish several goals. First, it would give the southeast quadrant its own special identity, currently lacking, that would set it apart from the more established sectors of downtown. Second, by creating a sequence of unique parcels, the boulevard would open up new development opportunities. Finally, the boulevard would establish a more prominent link between Main Street and the Convention Center.





### ***Downtown: A New Intermodal Development***

With the advent of a new METRO headquarters on Main Street at the Pierce Elevated, an opportunity exists to develop a major transit-oriented “gateway” that integrates LRT, the freeway, significant park-and-ride, and related mixed-use development.

The parking resource would offer direct access to and from the Pierce Elevated, maximizing the convenience of transfer from automobile to transit. This convenience creates a valuable parking resource for the various districts of the Main Street Corridor, promoting LRT ridership. This access also creates greater value for the METRO headquarters and related office or residential development.

A new “Cathedral Square” will be the centerpiece of the intermodal center, anchoring the proposed diagonal boulevard and serving as a park-like station for the LRT. The new square will be framed by development -- including a new Cathedral for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, contributing significant value to a revitalized urban district.



A new Cathedral Square





Precedent: Chicago's State Street



Precedent: New York's Paley Park

### ***Downtown: Landscape Considerations***

In the Central Business District, public space is usually limited to the sidewalk environment, which can often be inhospitable. The public environment should become more pedestrian-oriented, with an enhanced streetscape that provides street trees, plantings, shelter, and other amenities. Smaller parks, squares, and plazas should also be developed that are more accessible for the typical downtown visitor or resident.

Basement vaults, utilities, poor soil conditions, and shadows from tall buildings provide numerous obstacles to planting trees Downtown. In certain situations, it might be preferable to create canopies and trellises to provide shade and protection from the weather, especially at LRT stations. However, a strong landscaping theme should be developed in the esplanades created by center platform station configurations.

Houston has begun to rediscover the value of its bayous, as evidenced by Sesquicentennial Park and the planned improvements to Allen's Landing. The linear park systems along Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou should be further expanded, emphasizing connections to the Main Street Corridor. The crossings of Main Street and the bayous should be accentuated to create significant gateways. In addition, the celebration and vitality of water should be integrated into the streetscape wherever possible.





Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library

Allen's Landing



Rice Hotel Arcade

## ***Downtown: Historic Preservation Considerations***

Despite Houston's fervor for progress and the one-time routine demolition of historic structures downtown, the area south of Buffalo Bayou still contains the city's most concentrated collection of historic commercial buildings from the 19th and early 20th century. This area, the civic and commercial core of early Houston, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 as the Main Street/Market Square Historic District. The district was amended in 1984 to include an additional block and then listed as City of Houston Landmark District in 1997.

The National Register nomination describes Houston's Main Street as the commercial axis of the city that runs south from Allen's Landing at Buffalo Bayou to Texas Avenue, the southern boundary of the original city townsite:

*Flanking Main Street are the two public squares, Market Square and Courthouse Square, set aside by the founders. Until well into the 20th-century, this cruciform pattern of streets and places marked the bounds of the public and business life of Houston. Here were the municipal and county buildings, as well as structures dedicated to wholesale, retail, and financial enterprises. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development which occurred between Reconstruction and the building and real estate boom of the 1920s, the half-century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States. Connected with many of these buildings and places are the personalities and institutions which were instrumental in promoting the city's political and commercial advancement."*

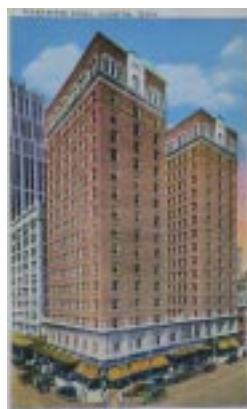
*[Boesel, Minette, Stephen Fox and Barrie Scardino, Main Street/Market Square Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1982.]*



Postcard Collection, Anna Mod  
The Gulf Building



Postcard Collection, Anna Mod  
The Humble Building



Postcard Collection, Anna Mod  
The Texas State Hotel

Outside of the historic district, there are numerous buildings throughout the downtown area from the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century of historic importance. A sampling include the **Gulf Building**, now Chase Bank Building, built in 1929 by architects Alfred C. Finn, Kenneth Franzheim and J. E. R. Carpenter. This building is typical of the Neo-Gothic skyscraper style that was popular in the 1920s across the country. The Gulf Building was the tallest skyscraper in Houston until 1963.

The **Humble Building**, now called Main Building, was built in 1921 and was the first headquarters of the company that would become Exxon.

The **Texas State Hotel** located off Main Street at 720 Fannin, was built in 1929 and designed by Joseph Finger. The later two buildings are presently vacant yet plans are underway for their rehabilitation, and both are eligible for the Investment Tax Credit Program, a partnership program of the National Park Service, Internal Revenue Service and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The program provides a 20% tax credit for certified rehabilitation of historic income producing properties.



Courtesy Harris County Heritage Society



Photo: Scott Field



Photo: Anna Mod

Three views of the Stegeman Building, from 1879 to the present

### *Case History – How buildings change over time*

The **Stegeman Building** was first a two-story Italianate corner commercial building built in 1879. A year later a Second Empire style mansard roof added a third story. The building was built for Frederick W. Stegeman, a manufacturer of ornamental ironwork. Progress and modernization has not been kind to this building and by 1980 the mansard roof had been removed, the second floor windows sealed and covered by signage from the ground floor fast food tenant. Today, the building appears top heavy, with the second floor windows still sealed. This building is considered non-contributing of the Main Street/Market Square Historic District due to unfavorable alterations. It could be reevaluated following a sensitive restoration.



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

1904 Main at Calhoun



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

1200 Block of Main Street



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Charles S. House home, Main Street at Jefferson



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Main looking north from Jefferson, early 20th c.

## ***Downtown: Main Street's Residential Roots***

In the late 1880s through the 1920s, a grand residential neighborhood of high-style Victorian-era mansions faced Main Street from the 1100 block, where Foley's is located, and extended south of the present-day Pierce elevated. The neighborhood was intact well into the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. The Humble Building, built in 1921, was one of the first commercial office buildings to locate in the neighborhood and thus began the change in land use. The 1926 Kirby Mansion, the second Kirby house on this site, at 2006 Smith Street is the last large house extant from the original neighborhood. The house has been used as offices since the late 1940s and stands adjacent to the Pierce Elevated.



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

T.H. Scanlan House, 1917 Main



## Midtown

Neglected for many years, the Midtown district is quickly re-emerging as a significant residential community, convenient to Downtown and other amenities and institutions. The challenge for Midtown is to resist the trend toward suburban style residential models, and to encourage a more mixed-use urban environment -- where housing is richly integrated with convenience retail, active sidewalks, and a variety of public open spaces.

In addition to this new residential development, Midtown is already home to a mixture of diverse communities, historic features, and dynamic institutions -- including the Vietnamese district, Houston Community College, Trinity Church, and Ensemble Theatre -- which constitute the ingredients of a great urban neighborhood. What is often lacking are more appropriate pedestrian linkages between these various uses, such as shaded walkways and small-scale in-fill development. The LRT project on Main Street offers an opportunity to help create these linkages, helping Midtown become a destination in itself, rather than a place to pass through on the way to somewhere else.



Ensemble Theatre



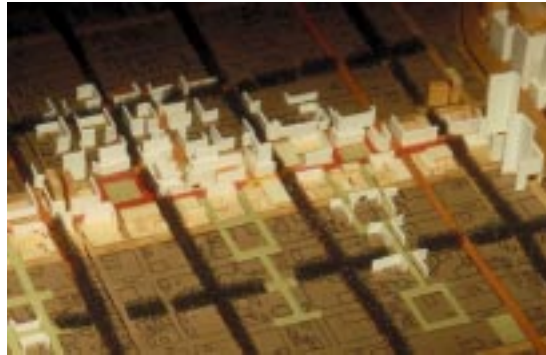
Trinity Church



New Residential Development on East Elgin



The Super Block -- One of many vacant parcels in Midtown



Midtown, Superblock District, View West



A reinforced street edge, integrated with LRT

### ***Midtown: North District - (Pierce Elevated to Elgin)***

The northern edge of Midtown should be integrated with the proposed “Gateway” intermodal development at the Pierce Elevated, creating a signature transition from Midtown to Downtown. The park-and-ride component and LRT connection will serve the existing institutions and future development in the district. The intermodal center is also an opportunity to address the problems of the existing Greyhound station, perhaps integrating it into a more secure and desirable facility.

The LRT stations in this district should be developed to reinforce urban streetscapes and create public open space. At the McGowen and Main station, the corners should be reinforced with development to the street edge. New public spaces should be created between stations on Main at McIlhenny, Dennis/Drew, and Anita. All open space should be framed with development to increase the value of both.

Midtown presently suffers from too many vacant parcels. A significant amount of additional development is required to produce the revenues needed for high-quality open space. As open space decreases, the remaining spaces become more valuable as addresses and more desirable for gathering. Except where new public spaces have been designated, all vacant parcels should be filled in with small-scale development (five stories and under) to the street edge. Parking should be located in smaller structures off of Main Street to retain an urban character for its streetscape.

The areas to the east and west in this portion of Midtown should be made to feel more a part of Main Street. The streets that terminate at Main Street -- such as McIlhenny, Bremond, Dennis, and Drew -- provide ideal opportunities for more intimate residential enclaves to the east. The streets westward should be enhanced with landscape and development to create more pedestrian-friendly connections to the Vietnamese district, which is presently concentrated on the higher velocity north-south streets, such as Milam and Louisiana.



### ***Midtown: Central District - (Elgin to Alabama)***

As in the north district of Midtown, the LRT station in this district should define a new public open space between Francis and Holman, framed with new development. Structured parking should be located off Main Street, or screened with ground-floor uses or single-loaded residential/office space.

This central district should also be developed in a manner that brings the vitality of the Houston Community College to its new administrative headquarters on Main Street, creating an active off-campus district in between. East-west streets such as Stuart, Francis, Holman, and Berry should be reinforced with in-fill development to the street edge, and the use of secondary alleyways and courtyards should be encouraged as extensions of campus life.



The new HCC administration facility should help create a more active streetscape





### ***Midtown: South District - (Alabama to 59 Freeway)***

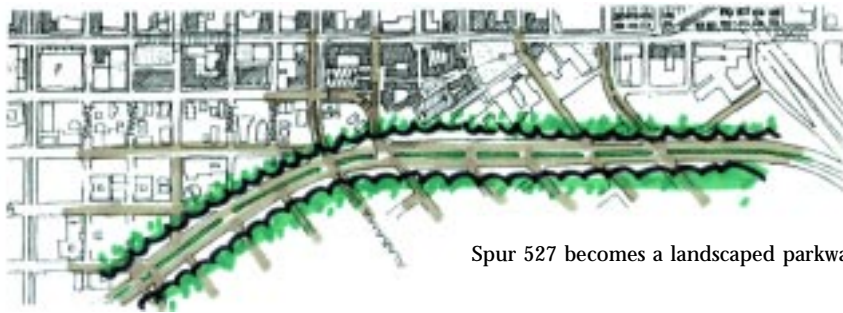
An opportunity for several major developments exists in the southern portion of Midtown. A new **High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA)** is proposed on Main Street between Truxillo and Cleburne, with frontage on the significant front lawn of the South Main Baptist Church. This enhanced “Church Square” will become the focus of the district -- framed by new mixed-use development on the east side of Main, as well.

To create new parcels for urban development, all existing surface parking would be consolidated in small parking structures shared by the institutions, which could also generate additional revenues for each.

The new HSPVA should be developed within a campus-like environment, with multiple buildings framing open spaces. Rather than an insular institution, the school should become a vibrant part of Midtown -- the youthful heart-beat of a burgeoning arts and entertainment scene in the neighborhood.



New HSPVA and Church Square

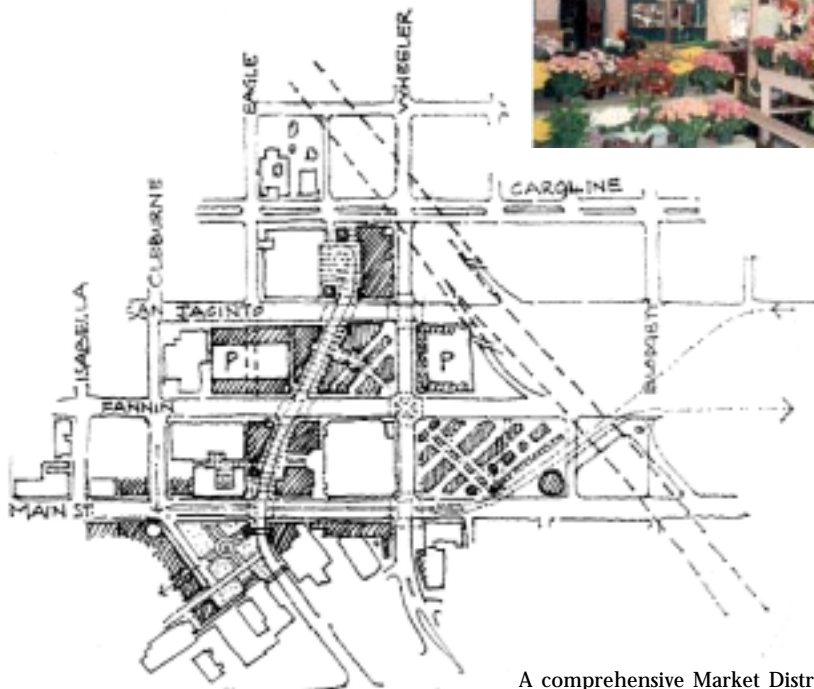


Spur 527 becomes a landscaped parkway

The Spur 527 is a formidable presence along the western edge of Midtown, an impenetrable obstacle between two vibrant neighborhoods. The Spur was the first stage of a plan -- never completed -- to link the 59 Freeway to the Pierce Elevated. Instead of an extended ramp, the Spur should be modified to create a landscaped boulevard in the tradition of Houston's great parkways. Framed with development to the street edge, the new parkway will contribute to a more humane urban environment. Punctuated with east-west crossings, the parkway also will greatly improve access from surrounding neighborhoods to Midtown, Main Street, and the LRT.



The LRT transition from Main Street to Fannin and San Jacinto presents a unique opportunity for a major transit-oriented development between Wheeler and Blodgett Streets. Spanning several blocks, this site is an ideal location to preserve and enhance the existing Flower District on Fannin, which may be adversely affected by the extensive LRT development. The new Flower Market would exude the same special character of the existing district, with both formal and informal structures and an expanded array of related uses.



A comprehensive Market District at the LRT transition

The new Flower Market would form the core of a revitalized district, which would also embrace the restored Sears and nearby theater buildings on Main Street. A new paseo-like "Latin Street" will link these uses with the Fiesta Market to the east, framed by a variety of intimate retail and restaurant uses. A major structured parking resource will be integrated with the new development, with improved access from the 59 Freeway to encourage park-and-ride options related to the LRT.



Landscape Precedents



### ***Midtown: Landscape Considerations***

Midtown is characterized by a more fine-grained scale of development than in Downtown -- more residential in nature with smaller and intermediate spaces between buildings. These spatial characteristics call for the creation of smaller and denser parks, squares, courts, and alleys that are within a five-minute walking distance of Main Street and the transit stations.

East-west greenways should be implemented that extend several blocks to link Main Street to the Vietnamese business community, Houston Community College, and other sub-districts. Tree-planting themes should be created that express the character of the adjacent neighborhoods. The reconfiguration of Spur 527 offers an opportunity to create a great parkway into Downtown.







Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library  
4000 block of Main Street, ca. 1940s



Photo: Maureen Perea

The Cohen Building



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library  
3717 Main Street (demolished 1960)



Photo: Maria Perez

The Old Waldorf Hotel



Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library  
2210 Main Street (demolished 1968)



Photo: Maureen Perea

The Saigon Building

## Midtown: Historic Preservation Considerations

In the 1990s, Midtown changed from an urban “wasteland” with expanses of open land and scattered development to what is becoming a dense urban mixed-use area and residential area. Sadly, lack of planning in the area has once again supported the haphazard development so endemic to Houston.

The north-south through-streets in Midtown were traditionally commercial with some residential structures. Midtown neighborhoods were a mixture of large and modest houses, as well as small apartment complexes. Commercial hold-outs from the past that maintain their historic integrity in Midtown include the 1929 **Cohen Building**, designed by Joseph Finger; the **Old Waldorf Hotel**, built in 1927; and the **Saigon Building**, built in 1948. One of the crown jewels of this area of Main Street is **Isabella Courts**, built in 1928-1929 and designed by W. D. Bordeaux.



Isabella Courts



Postcard collection, Randle Pace

Sears & Roebuck, vintage postcard, ca. 1940



Architectural Record, September 1940

Sears & Roebuck, northeast view, 1940



Photo: Anna Mod

Sears Building, Spring 2000

There are many buildings on Main Street that have suffered minor or major alterations, making them ineligible for listing on the National Register or as a City of Houston Landmark. The most notable is the **Sears and Roebuck building** at the northeast corner of Main Street and Wheeler. Designed in 1939 by the Chicago firm of Nimmons, Carr and Wright, the Modern-style concrete-and-steel building had its grand entrance at Main Street and Wheeler, with a veranda and garden terrace at the second level. The present corrugated metal cladding follows the original Modern definition of the building.

Originally there were three separate buildings on the Sears site: the main department store; a fully-equipped auto service station to the north; and a separate building across Fannin for the display of agricultural machinery. The complex was designed some distance from downtown, such that “the potential customer from the city may find convenient parking, the local customer may make the trip on foot or by automobile, and the suburban customer may stop and make purchases conveniently on the way either to or from the city.” [Architectural Record: Five Stores for Sears-Roebuck, September 1940]

In the 1960s or 1970s, the building was encapsulated in corrugated metal and the display windows filled with brick. The result is an unwelcoming fortress of a building with no curb appeal. Often, when buildings have been encapsulated as this one has, the original façade and details remain beneath, sometimes with very little damage. The building should be investigated to determine the condition of the Modern façade beneath the present cladding. A planned and sensitive restoration would be eligible for the 20% Investment Tax Credit, and would turn Sears into a focal point of Midtown.

As the LRT makes its transition from Main Street to Fannin, the tracks will likely pass through the existing **United Jewelry Building**, built in 1948 and designed by Edward F. Sibbert. From 1932 to 1944, Sibbert was head architect for the Kress Company, an American five-and-dime chain. Most Kress stores are more urban in their setting and design, flanked by neighboring buildings. Houston’s example at this location is one of Kress’s suburban models in the Modern style. This building will most likely be demolished.



## Museum District

Houston's Museum District is home to a remarkable concentration of world-class cultural institutions, historic churches, elegant greenery, and other valuable resources. But what is lacking is a sense of connection and cohesion between these various components -- a public realm that ties everything together. These pedestrian linkages and gathering places are the hallmark of every renowned cultural district, the elements that distinguish a collection of individual places from a true destination.

The heart of the Museum District is oriented around two very different axes. Main Street runs north and south and is defined primarily by the frontages of several prominent churches. The Bissonnet/Binz axis runs east and west and is defined primarily by its proximity to many of the the district's museums.

### *Museum District: Main Street Axis*

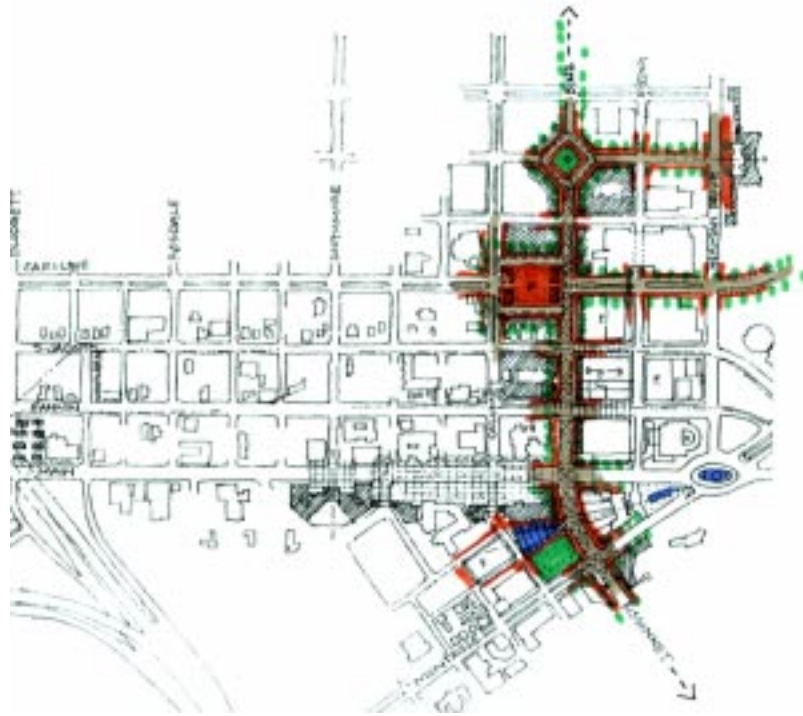
New street and hardscape enhancements should celebrate Main Street as a revitalized "front door" for the churches. Because most of the churches have rear parking lots, their patrons tend to enter via back doors, leaving their more dramatic Main Street frontages underutilized. By removing the curbs and creating a European-style plaza environment framed by landscape, Main Street is transformed from a right-of-way into a great public space. Encouraging angled parking and outdoor events along Main Street on Sundays will reactivate the sidewalks and front doors of the churches, and extend the stay of their patrons.

Creating a greater variety of uses along Main Street will also contribute to its vitality. By consolidating the existing surface parking at the First Presbyterian Church into a new shared parking structure off of Main Street, a new development parcel can be created in the Museum District for a museum, school, restaurant, or other amenity. A new museum site should be defined on the west side of Main Street at Southmore -- a traditional axis to Main Street from the Third Ward -- perhaps for an African-American or Hispanic Heritage Museum.



Main Street Axis





Binz Street Axis



## ***Museum District: Binz Street Axis***

Because of its importance as a corridor for many museums, Bissonnet and Binz Streets should be emphasized as a principal focus of the District -- an “Art Walk” that unites institutions, open spaces, offices, housing, restaurants, and retail into a vibrant pedestrian environment. The anticipated LRT stations on Fannin and San Jacinto between Binz and Ewing should be designed so as to reinforce this vision. Another LRT station location is recommended to increase ridership, perhaps located at Southmore.

A new “Museum Square” should be developed between Binz and Calumet at Caroline, framed by commercial galleries, cafes, and a new front door for the expanded Holocaust Museum on Binz. Another significant open space should anchor the Children’s Museum on Binz at LaBranch, framed by development. Shared structured parking will be integrated at each new open space and throughout the district, providing convenience without dominating the view.

On the Bissonnet portion of the Binz axis, the Museum of Fine Arts’ Noguchi Garden should be reinforced with a complementary water-oriented open space. Further improvements will create a more pedestrian-friendly entrance for the Museum, with the option of creating a pedestrian-only plaza for special events.

A fully-integrated program of lighting, street furniture, events banners, hardscape, and landscape should be developed for the entire Museum District, with a distinctive public art component focused on Binz. Such a program will help to reinforce pedestrian linkages among the various institutions, open spaces, and other uses -- and help to define the Museum District as a special destination in Houston.



## Museum District: Landscape Considerations

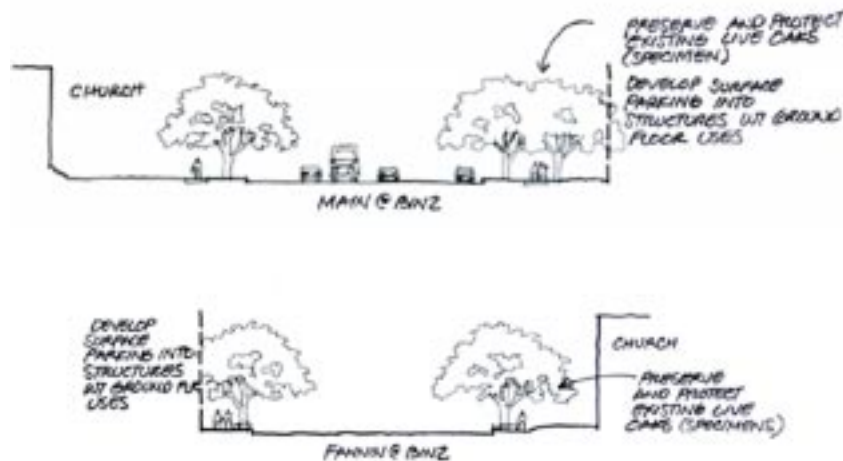
Within the Museum District, Main Street has some of the finest Live Oak street trees in the entire city. These trees should be preserved and protected, and duplicated throughout the District wherever possible. Along the Binz Street “Art Walk,” a shaded canopy formed by a double row of Live Oaks will expand on this Main Street character and encourage more pedestrian activity. The Museum District’s pedestrian environment will be further enhanced by integrating distinctive landscape features with all new squares, water features, and promenades.

At the anticipated off-ramp from the 59 Freeway to Main Street, there is a great opportunity to create a significant gateway for the Museum District. A detention basin will be integrated with the off-ramp site, which affords the opportunity to create a wonderful gateway park and water feature.

## Museum District: Historic Preservation Considerations

A random mixture of building types and services marks the northern edge of the Museum District. On the west side of Main Street at Rosedale is the Art-Deco **Barker Brothers Studio**, designed by Joseph Finger in 1930, which now houses the Lawndale Art and Performance Center. Next door is the 1948 **Massey Business College** (formerly Weldon’s Cafeteria). Both buildings are eligible for listing on the National Register, and the Massey building is an excellent example of the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on local architects MacKie and Kamrath. Other historically important structures, ineligible for historic architecture designation due to alteration, include the Warwick Hotel (1924, 1926) and the Museum of Fine Arts (1924, 1926).

The 5300 and 5500 blocks of Main Street have three significant historic churches. Hobart Upjohn and Maurice J. Sullivan designed the 1949 **First Presbyterian Church** at 5300 Main Street. At 5315 Main Street, **St. Matthew Lutheran Church**, formerly First Congregational Church, dates from 1927 and was designed by J. W. Northrop, Jr. Alfred C. Finn’s **St. Paul’s Methodist Church** dates from 1930.





## Hermann Park/Rice University

The section of Main Street at Hermann Park and Rice University is one of the most cherished places in all of Houston. For many Houstonians, the signature traffic circle at Mecom Fountain -- and the magnificent canopy of Live Oaks -- embody not only Houston's past, but also its potential for the future.

Several improvements are recommended to further enhance this one-of-a-kind experience on Main Street. First, an opportunity should be created to allow for the temporary closure of Main Street along the Park during off-peak hours for outdoor art fairs or other public festivities. Such events would offer a new way for pedestrians to experience this special part of Main Street -- which is presently more oriented to the automobile.



Main Street - Existing Conditions



Hermann Park Entrance - Existing Conditions

In addition, the traditional and ceremonial Hermann Park entrance at the Mecom Fountain should be reinforced and pedestrian access greatly improved. Presently a muddle of criss-crossing streets, traffic signals, parked cars, and other obstructions visually impact the area. This important vista into the Park should be emphasized as much as possible -- perhaps with a sequence of water elements from the Fountain to the Park's Lagoon along the Montrose axis, incorporating the Sam Houston Memorial.

The integration of LRT along Fannin Street at Hermann Park should be done with the utmost sensitivity to the surrounding beauty. The anticipated station at Sunset should be designed in an appropriate park-like manner, framed by the entry gates to the Park and to Rice University. The LRT station at MacGregor should likewise emphasize the entries into the Park and Zoo.

As a precious oasis in the heart of Houston, the green spaces of Hermann Park should be protected and preserved, and opportunities should be explored to expand their boundaries wherever possible. Despite the pressing need for parking resources, new surface lots within the Park should be discouraged, and opportunities for shared structured parking with surrounding institutions and districts should be promoted.

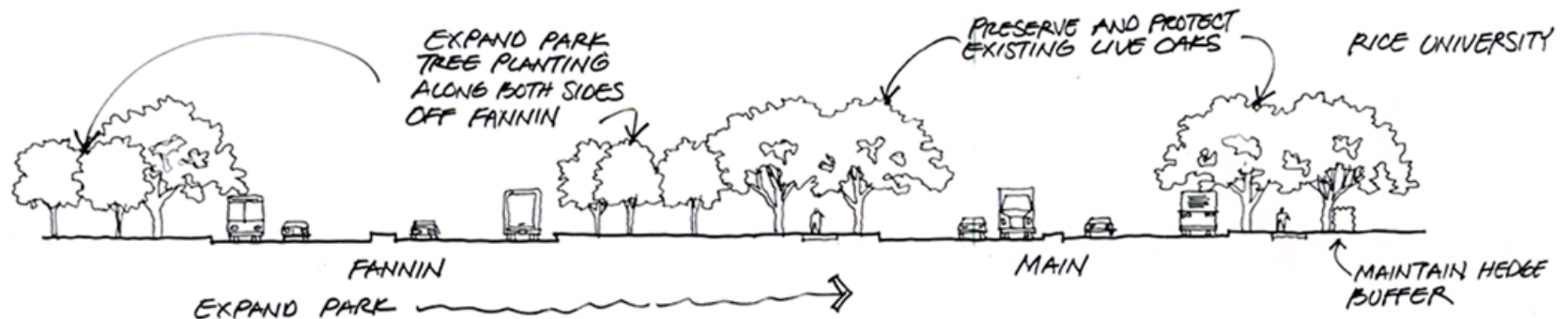




### *Hermann Park/Rice University: Landscape Considerations*

Hermann Park is the crown jewel of Main Street. What is experienced today began with a grand vision many years ago. However, the western edge of the park became poorly defined after Fannin Street was extended along the edge of the Park.

The Park should be expanded toward Main Street by heavily planting Live Oak trees along Fannin. This will create a well-defined and consistent edge to the Park that will serve to reconnect the narrow parkway between Main and Fannin Streets to the rest of the park. As such, Main and Fannin Streets will be made to feel more a part of Hermann Park and not just streets cutting through.





Hermann Park - Vintage Postcard



Circular Colonnade and Fountain

### ***Hermann Park/Rice University: Historic Preservation***

This area of Main Street, the most beautiful in the city with its allée of mature Live Oak trees, is a dramatic part of what remains of the original 1916 Hermann Park master plan by St. Louis landscape architect George E. Kessler. George H. Hermann donated the parkland to the city in 1914. Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare carried out the park master plan well into the 1950s, following Kessler's death in 1923.

Sadly, due to increased park use, traffic and the expansion of institutions within the park, the original designs of Kessler and Hare & Hare have been carved away. [Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*, second edition. Houston: AIA, 1999.] Historic resources under study in Hermann Park include the Sam Houston Memorial, built in 1925, and the circular colonnade sculpture and fountain, built in 1920. The original landscape plan and plantings have been too encroached upon to qualify for National Register listing.

Farther south and hidden behind the live oaks are the **E. A. Palmer Memorial Chapel** at 6221 Main Street -- designed by William Ward Watkin -- and the **Autry House**, built in 1921 and designed by Cram & Ferguson and William Ward Watkin. Both properties are listed on the National Register, and Autry House, built as a study center for nearby Rice University students, is also a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.



A New Plaza at Main/Fannin and Holcombe



Fannin at Holcombe - Existing Conditions



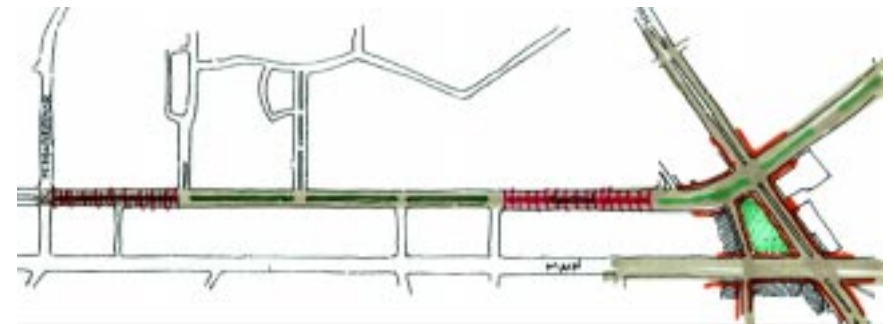
Fannin Street - Existing Conditions

## Texas Medical Center (TMC)

The Texas Medical Center functions almost as its own city within Houston -- a community of world-renowned medical institutions. As such, the Medical Center's own Master Plan addresses its challenges with regard to parking, circulation, security, growth, and amenities.

The LRT on Fannin will be a major resource for the Medical Center to alleviate its parking and traffic concerns by promoting employee ridership and linking the LRT to remote surface parking. The LRT should also help to reinforce Fannin as the "Main Street" through the Medical Center, creating a more urban edge for what has traditionally been a more suburban character of development. Landscaped medians and other improvements should be encouraged along Fannin to establish a civic presence, integrated with LRT.

At the southern edge of the Medical Center, a new "Gateway Plaza" is proposed at Holcombe by eliminating the grade-separated intersections at Fannin and Main, with new development opportunities for adjacent properties. This new civic plaza will establish a more favorable first impression for the Medical Center and create a new gathering place for outdoor activities. The existing below-grade right-of-way can be adapted for LRT-only access to alleviate traffic congestion above.







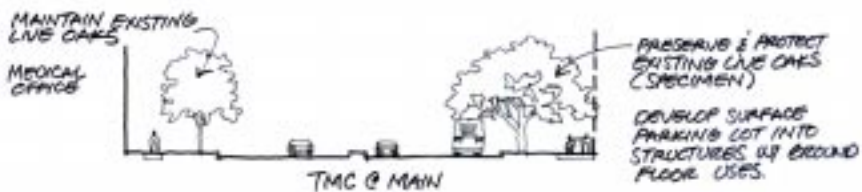
### *Texas Medical Center: Landscape Considerations*

Landscape at the Texas Medical Center is based on a suburban model and is of a particularly high quality. Buildings have wide setbacks from the street, and the landscape is lush and park-like. There are several outdoor spaces for dining that are buffered from the street with wide planting beds. The Medical Center is basically an internally-oriented campus with pedestrians traveling from building to building; however, pedestrian activity is particularly intense along Fannin Street. Fewer pedestrians use Main Street where the streetscape is primarily an enhancement to the Medical Center's image.



One exception is the area along Holcombe Street between Main Street and Fannin. Here, pedestrian and vehicular circulation is difficult, if not dangerous. With the implementation of the LRT system, an opportunity exists to elevate the vehicle lanes of Main and Fannin Streets to grade level and create a gateway plaza. Redevelopment would provide an opportunity to reorient the space from automobiles to pedestrians and provide better pedestrian access through the TMC.

Brays Bayou bisects the TMC and is identified to become a linear park with hiking and bike trail connections to the rest of the city. Prominent features should be developed that accentuate the crossings of the bayou and streets.





Hermann Hospital



Hermann Professional Building



Methodist Hospital

Photos Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library

## *Texas Medical Center: Historic Preservation Considerations*

Houston's urban park setting changes radically to a dense, bustling quasi-urban setting just south of MacGregor as the Texas Medical Center begins. The trustees of the M. D. Anderson Foundation conceived of the idea for the medical center in the 1940s.

The city owned a 134-acre site adjacent to Hermann Hospital (built in 1925, Berlin & Swern and Alfred C. Finn, architects) and Hermann Park, which passed from the city to the foundation following a popular vote. The Texas Medical Center, Incorporated, was organized and received title to the land in 1945. Under the leadership of Ernst William Bertner, the board of directors worked to attract institutions related to health education, research, and patient care and developed the programs necessary to assure the highest standards of attainment in medicine. [Texas Medical Center, Handbook of Texas Online].

Historic buildings considered potentially eligible for listing in the National Register in the Texas Medical Center include the **Hermann Hospital** (built 1925), **Hermann Professional Building** (built 1949), and **Methodist Hospital** (built 1951).



Astrodomain - "A New Town in Town"



Astrodomain - Existing Conditions



South Main - A Landscaped Parkway

## South Main/Astrodomain

Once a rural route with green pastures and motor inns, the stretch of Main Street south of Holcombe to the 610 Loop presently lacks any real identity as a district. The first impression of this area is one of suburban sprawl -- similar to the outskirts of many urban centers.

The Astrodomain is located too far away to have any sort of presence on South Main, but the property in between is ripe for a major development that can make this connection more dramatic and provide a great new open space for Houston. This new **Exposition Park** -- or "new town in town" -- would create a new "front door" for the Astrodomain on Main Street and establish a bold and forward-looking identity for the entire district.

Framed with significant development and open space, this new destination would become the principal site for many of Houston's major festivals and public parties, and would soften the impression of the Astrodomain as a vast parking lot. Incorporating Brays Bayou directly into the Park would add a distinctive natural feature and maximize the area's utility for regional flood control.

A major portion of **South Main** is already designated for significant roadway and landscape improvements, and a parkway environment with lush medians is recommended. At the 610 Loop, a major gateway to Main Street should be created, incorporating dramatic open spaces and water features for flood control, framed with new development. The few remaining elements of South Main's roadside heritage should be preserved and enhanced wherever possible to maintain authenticity and local character.

Although LRT is located far from Main Street in this district, a great terminus for the system should be created at the Astrodome and future Exposition Hall, with a significant new public space and park-and-ride resource.



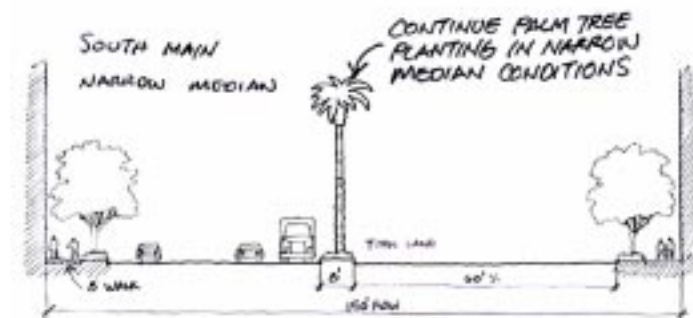
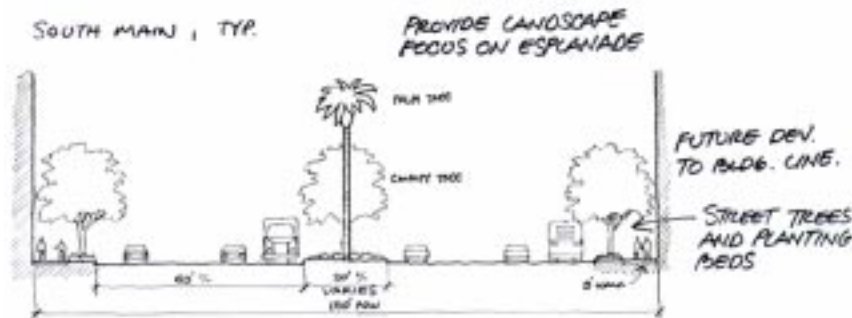
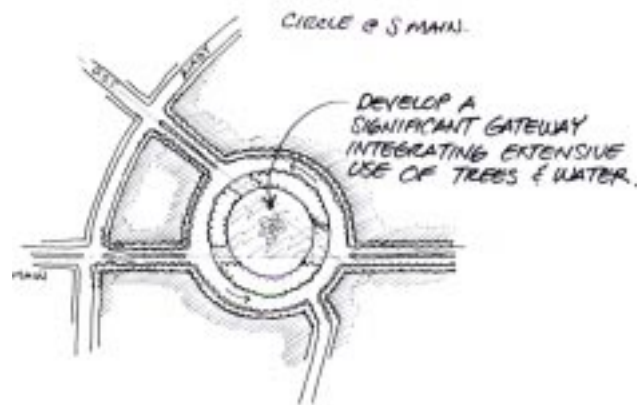


## South Main/Astrodomain: Landscape Considerations

The Astrodomain is a destination attraction with a scale unparalleled in the city. In extending nearby Brays Bayou to the Astrodomain, the significant new open space created will have a scale compatible with that of surrounding activities. Although the automobile dominates the area, consideration must be given to creating a more humanized, pedestrian-scale environment, incorporating trees and water at a grand scale.

South Main is located at one of the most visible areas of Houston. Because of the number of people that travel through this area -- and the scale of the adjacent Astrodomain and the 610 Loop -- South Main should be enhanced as a major signature boulevard. Significant gateways should be developed that incorporate an extensive use of trees and water. South Main is currently being reconstructed to accommodate increased traffic. This provides a prime opportunity to integrate the landscape principles of Main Street.

Existing conditions along South Main are inconsistent, including a wide variety of low-end businesses and underutilized land. Adjacent uses typically create a myriad of curb cuts for access. Because of the transient nature of adjacent development, any near-term landscape improvements should be focused on the esplanades. The esplanade width presently varies, making it difficult to develop a planting program with typical canopy trees. However, palm trees could be planted in the narrow areas to create a dynamic visual focus.





Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library

Astrodome, ca. 1968



Photo: Paul Hester and William Lukes

South Main, 1972



Photo: Anna Mod

Crestwood Motel, South Main, Spring 2000

## ***South Main/Astrodomain: Historic Preservation***

The Astrodome, officially called the **Harris County Domed Stadium**, was the first fully air-conditioned, enclosed, domed, multi-purpose sports stadium in the world, and became the prototype for domed sports arenas. The stadium has a clear span of 642 feet, an inside height of 208 feet, a lighting maximum of 300 footcandles, an air-filtering system of activated charcoal, and a man-made field cover known as Astroturf.

Originally the field was natural grass, but the plastic roof was eventually painted because outfielders had trouble tracking fly balls during daylight in the bright glare and criss-cross network of girders overhead. The lack of sunlight killed the grass, but Chemstrand, then experimenting with an outdoor artificial carpet, produced what came to be called Astroturf. [Astrodome, The Handbook of Texas Online] The Astrodome is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and is significant as the world's first enclosed, domed stadium. Houston has proudly called the Dome the "Eighth Wonder of the World."

Adjacent to the 610 Loop, South Main begins to recover its identity as US 90, although it is increasingly difficult due to haphazard development and the ongoing street widening. Before the interstate system, US 90 was the only federal highway east and west from Houston. As late as the 1970s, there were still cattle grazing in open fields along the highway in this area. Early development adjacent to the highway was small-scale, including independently owned motels from the 1950s and earlier and other automobile tourist amenities. The site plan of early roadside motels usually had a front office building with a drive-through carport, a horseshoe-shaped interior drive with one-story perimeter rooms and parking, and a central oasis with landscaping or a swimming pool. The **Grant Motel** and the **Crestwood**, still extant along this section of South Main, maintain their original configuration, architectural integrity, and original landscaping.

#### IV. Implementation



Main Street, ca. 1925



## Plan Implementation

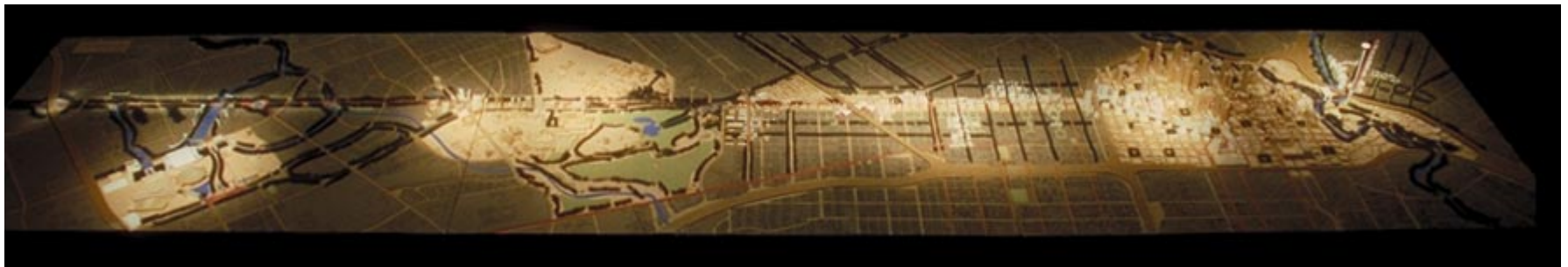
The ambitious scope and expansive scale of this conceptual design plan for the Main Street Corridor creates a unique challenge with regard to implementation — especially in a city with a development tradition so adverse to public regulation.

Implementation of the plan can benefit immensely from building on resources that already abound in Houston – including current development initiatives, other available funding (such as transit and flood control), and a rediscovery of the city's own tradition of street trees, esplanades, and parkways. Effective implementation can also be facilitated by articulating solutions that address the specific problems and constraints of Houston – responding to the needs of circulation and parking, integrating flood control into the landscape, and guiding the character of development rather than specific land uses.

Essential to the plan's ultimate success is an expeditious demonstration that public/private coordination can result in a measurable improvement of the corridor's urban environment. It is our recommendation that such a demonstration be carried out on both a “macro” and “micro” level – implementing an overall standard of public improvements for the entire length of Main Street, and implementing more focused development plans for three pilot zones within the corridor.

### *The Macro Level: A New Standard for Main Street*

- **One standard of lighting, paving, signage, and street furniture** for Main Street -- along the lines of the Cotswold Streets and Texas Avenue – that can grow and improve and that does not preclude individual expression within each district. (The glue that holds everything together.)
- **METRO standards** for light rail infrastructure and station criteria, as well as bus and park-and-ride linkages.
- **General conditions and regulations** relating to the street environment, such as prohibiting parking lots, parking structure frontages, and curb cuts along Main Street.
- **A structured system of coordination** among City and County departments, METRO, and the Main Street Coalition to track the progress of design and implementation.



### Main Street Corridor Master Plan

## *The Micro Level: Pilot Development Districts*

Three specific sites are proposed for the implementation of more focused plans with regard to development guidelines and regulations. The regulatory framework is to be less concerned with specific land uses, and targeted more toward specific building heights, setbacks, materials, open space character, and the like.

The purpose of these development districts is to attract developers who favor controls as a means of protecting their significant investment in a higher-quality environment. The three pilot districts were identified based on their need for improvement; the concentration of public, private, institutional, and community interests involved; and a level of manageability based on administrative structures already in place.

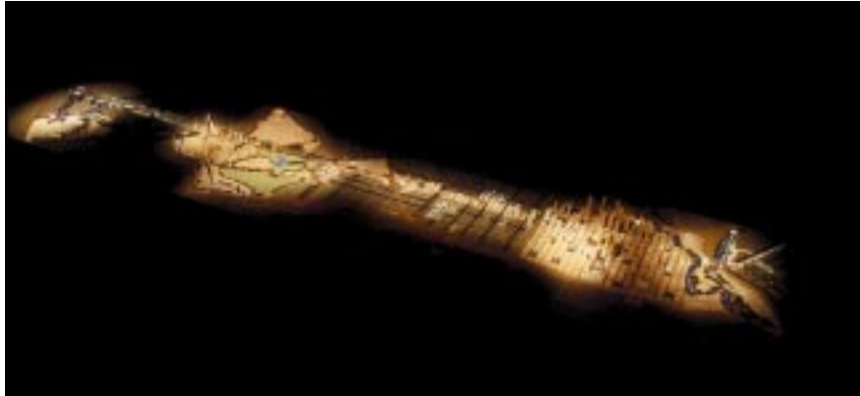
- **Downtown** – an area on the southern quadrant that will be comprised of a new arena and/or cathedral site, the future METRO headquarters and intermodal center (incorporating the Pierce Elevated and Greyhound site), and significant new mixed-use development and public space.
- **Midtown** – the area concentrated near the anticipated Wheeler/Blodgett transition of the LRT, comprised of a new Flower Market, a new High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, the existing South Main Baptist Church, the restored Sears building, the Fiesta Market, and restored movie theater.
- **Museum District** – the area concentrated along Main Street (“Church Row”) and Binz Street (“Art Walk”), comprised of existing church and museum institutions, new museum development and expansion, new mixed-use development, and improved pedestrian linkages and open spaces.

Both Downtown and Midtown presently have administrative entities – the Houston Downtown Management District and Midtown Redevelopment Authority, respectively – that are capable of managing the design and implementation of their development plans and regulations. We recommend the establishment of a similar agency/entity for the Museum District to carry out the same improvement functions.

Certain other areas within the Main Street Corridor may already have appropriate jurisdiction to enforce elements of this master plan, much as the Texas Medical Center enforces its own controls and guidelines within its boundaries. For example, the sports and recreation Exposition Park proposed for the South Main district could be implemented on property under the authority of Harris County, without the need for creating an additional regulatory entity.

Because of the resources already at work within the three proposed development districts, their individual plans can be implemented most quickly and effectively to demonstrate a level of success that can then be duplicated throughout the entire Main Street Corridor.





## Acknowledgments

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The Main Street Coalition is comprised of dozens of individuals and organizations who gave many hours of their time to participate in this planning and design process. The Main Street Corridor Master Plan would not have been possible without the effort and insights of everyone who participated.